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# JEWISH BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS









“MIQRA'OTH GEDOLOTH”  
HEBREW TEXT OF SCRIPTURES WITH COMMENTARIES



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# JEWISH BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS

BY  
WILLIAM ROSENAU, Ph. D.  
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY.



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**THIS BOOK  
IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED  
BY THE AUTHOR  
TO HIS WIFE,  
MABEL HELLMAN ROSENAU.**



## PREFACE

During the winter of the scholastic year 1905-1906, the author delivered a course of lectures, on the subject of which this book treats, before the Oriental Seminary of the Johns Hopkins University. At the conclusion of the course, some of the students expressed the desire of possessing the lectures in permanent form. Acting on this wish, on the consciousness that few people know anything of the contribution of Jews to the science of Biblical criticism, and on the hope that a word on the subject may be welcome, the author herewith presents the results of his investigation in popular form. Footnotes, giving more exhaustive explanations, have been omitted, because lacking in interest for the majority of readers. Not all Biblical commentators have been treated in this book, as not all are of equal importance. Only such have been considered as represent distinct schools of criticism.

W. R.





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**COMMENTATORS OF THE  
TALMUDIC PERIOD**



## CHAPTER I

### COMMENTATORS OF THE TALMUDIC PERIOD

Biblical Exegesis is not a new science. Long before the modern schools of Biblical criticism made their first attempts to unravel the mysteries, explain the perplexities, and give the history of Scriptures, people devoted themselves to the study of the Bible. While it can not be denied, that Biblical scholars all the way from Wellhausen back to Santes Pagninus, a Dominican Monk of the sixteenth century, rendered valuable service to the cause, it can also not be disputed, that the preliminary work, done by others, living between the first and sixteenth centuries, made the task of the more recent critics, comparatively easy. It may, in very truth, be asserted, that the moderns built upon the discoveries and theories of the ancients, in this, the Biblical, as well as in all other intellectual disciplines.

Nor should it be imagined, when reference is made to the activity of earlier critics, that acknowledgement is given merely to such men as the Epicurean philosopher Celsus, the Neo-Platonist Porphyry, the Greek Hadrian, the African bishop Junilius, Cassiodorus, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, Nicolas de Lyra and others. Sight should never be lost of the activity of Jews in Biblical Exegesis, not only up to, but also after the sixteenth century. The Jews, in fact, may be said to have called into life the science of Biblical Exegesis. It matters little, whether their method of interpretation is regarded scien-

tific in the modern acceptation of the term "scientific." The fact remains, that they studied the Bible, with the object of acquiring a thorough knowledge, not merely of the "Tendenz" of every one of the component books, but also of the meaning of passages and the connotation of words. That the Jews should have been foremost in Biblical research, is not surprising, when we consider, that they were the authors of the Bible, that their faith was founded upon it, and that they looked upon it as the advocate of humanity's highest ideals of civilization, not to forget, that until a very late day, the claim of the divine origin of Scriptures was rather general among Jews. "The study of the law superseded every other duty" in their estimation. They, virtually, if not literally, carried out the commands "to teach it diligently to their children, when sitting in the house, when walking by the way, when lying down and when rising up"; and "to meditate therein day and night." Not only that "ignorance of the law rendered piety impossible," but the neglect of the law for some other work endangered Israel's life. The following Talmudical account brings out this point. Hadrian, the Roman Emperor, had forbidden Jews to engage in the study of the law, which included the whole Bible and all the disciplines related to it. Despite the imperial edict, Rabbi Akibah taught the law publicly. A certain man, named Papus, called him to account for his disobedience, whereupon Akibah told the following fable. A fox promenaded along a river's bank, and, noticing that the fishes were swimming nervously to and fro, inquired of what they were afraid. They answered: "We fear the fishermen's nets." "Come upon the dry land and we will live to-

gether, like the first animals on earth," remarked the sly fox. The fishes replied: "You are unjustly regarded the smartest member of the animal kingdom. Do you not know that, though we may not be safe in the water, death must needs come to us if we venture upon the dry land?" The application of the fable made by Akibah was to this effect. Let Israel get away from its law and its dissolution is inevitable.

Another point worthy of mention in this connection, because demonstrating the extent to which the Jews busied themselves with Scriptures and its interpretation, is their almost unvarying tendency to regard every subject of study they pursued in their dispersion, from the Biblical point of view. The well-known attempt of Maimonides, a Jewish teacher, living in the twelfth century, to defend Judaism against the then dominant Aristotelianism, is by no means the only instance proving the effort of Jews at harmonizing philosophy and other systems of thought with Biblical teaching.

In searching for the first Jewish Biblical exegete, we are led back to a time preceding by several centuries the close of the Biblical canon. Ezra called **סופר מהיר בתורה** **משה** "an expert scribe in the law of Moses" may be regarded, as far as historical documentary evidence can be trusted, the father of Biblical Exegesis. The Hebrew equivalent for "exegesis" is **מדרש** from a root **דרש** meaning "to seek," "search," and, hence, to "expound"; a verb occurring in Ezra 7:10, which reads: "And Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord."

That Ezra should have been the first to devote himself to the development of Biblical interpretation and



should have been responsible for the cultivation of this discipline, at the hands of others, is easily explained, on the basis of the culture existing among the people of his time living in Palestine. In the middle of the fifth century before the Christian era, the colonists who had returned from the exile to the land of their fathers could not be considered a well established theocracy. Apart from the adverse political conditions, the ignorance of the people in the Mosaic law, which required explanation before it could be understood, not to mention their lack of acquaintance with the classical Hebrew, operated against the immediate and complete formation of an enduring Jewish commonwealth. The commonwealth of Israel had to be founded on the law of Moses, and the establishment of the law presupposed its execution. In the course of time the prophetic books and the sacred writings were added. These, as well as the Pentateuch, were ordered to be read at stated times, but were in a language, which the common people did not understand. The office of "Methurgeman," interpreter, was, therefore, created. This official gave the meaning of passages of Scriptures, as soon as read, paraphrasing often, instead of translating into the dialect in vogue among the people.

The interpretations of the existing Scriptures undoubtedly called forth discussions as to their justification. Men, learned in the law, and teachers by profession soon gathered about themselves disciples, in order to disseminate their understanding of the scriptural text, and thus the schools, which flourished in Palestine and later also in Babylonia, arose. These schools, which increased in numbers and in usefulness from year to year,

may be said to have given Biblical interpretation its strongest impetus, by virtue of the subjects, to which their courses of instruction were confined. They taught two things: "The "Miqra," the Scriptures (including Pentateuch, Prophets, and Hagiographa) by means of which, the intelligent reading of the text, and its division into sentences and words were in great measure fixed. The Miqra was also known as "the written law" and formed the subject of elementary instruction in the schools.

The other subject taught was "the oral law," called so in contradistinction to the written law. It included all interpretations or explanations of the intent and purpose of Biblical laws and passages, as well as all the new civil, criminal and religious enactments, for which the ever-changing political and cultural status called. While these interpretations were originally transmitted by word of mouth from father to son and from teacher to pupil, they were written down eventually, on account of the inability of the human memory to retain intact all these ever-increasing traditions and on account of the desire to prevent the traditions from becoming lost. Several efforts were made before Rabbi Jehudah of the third century, to systematize all the existing traditional material, but it remained for him to give to the world that work known by the name "Mishnah" literally meaning "teaching." And as at the time of the third century the material became too ponderous to be carried by the memory, a condition necessitating the formation of the Mishnah, so at the close of the fifth century two men, Rabbina and Rab Ashi, put to writing, in a work known as the Talmud, traditions based on and interpreting the

text of the Mishnah, in which a great mass of material is found that is of Biblical exegetical interest.

The exegesis of the schools of Palestine and Babylonia, preserved in the Mishnah and Talmud, is threefold in character. We have the Midrashoth, Halakhoth, and Haggadoth.

First in point of time are the Midrashoth. They are the interpretations of the Scriptural, more especially the Pentateuchal passages containing legal enactments.

From this class eventually evolved the two remaining kinds of interpretations, which alternate with one another or at times are even fused into one another in the Mishnah, the Talmud and the other literary monuments of the Talmudic period of Jewish History.

The Halakhoth (from "halakh" to go, to be in vogue) are statutes exegetically derived from and connected with Scriptures.

The Haggadoth (from "nagad" to tell, to narrate), are interpretations derived from the Scriptures, but not directly connected with the same.

While these three classes cover all the interpretations of the Talmudic period, the interpretations recorded are also known either by the name "Peshat" the plain interpretation (from "pashat" to unfold) or by the name "Derash," the implied or figurative meaning (from "darash" to search, to expound). That in the "peshat" more of reason was displayed, while in the "derash" the imagination was given loose rein, is evident from the terms themselves.

In this connection it should also be borne in mind that the Biblical interpretations of the Mishnah and Talmud are not found collated in any one part of either work.

They are scattered all through these works, and are recorded only as the necessities of the subject under consideration required them or called for them.

In the Mishnah and Talmud and also in kindred works of Mishnah and Talmud, various principles of interpretation were employed.

The first person to formulate definite rules for guidance in this discipline, was Hillel, who flourished during the close of the first century before the common era. These rules were seven in number and are as follows:

a. The inference from a minor to a major case, or vice versa.

b. The inference based on analogy of expressions in the Scriptures.

c. The generalization from one special provision in the Scriptures.

d. The generalization based on two special provisions in the Scriptures.

e. The inference based on the use of general and particular terms used in a Scriptural passage.

f. The inference based on the analogy established between two Scriptural passages.

g. The inference based on the context.

These seven rules of Hillel were expanded to thirteen by a certain Rabbi Ishmael living in the second century, and to thirty-two by Rabbi Eliezer, his disciple.

A method of Biblical interpretation, differing widely from that based on the foregoing rules and their expansions, is that introduced by Nahum of Gamzu, toward the close of the first and the beginning of the second century. It consisted of the use of certain particles and conjunctions for the purpose of arriving at implied

meanings in Scriptural passages. The method is known by the name of "extension and limitation." Examples of particles of extension are "af" and "gam," meaning "also," and examples of particles of limitation are "akh" and "raq" meaning "but." We shall cite but one passage where this method is employed. The law with regard to the Sabbath is most rigorous in the Pentateuch. In Ex. 31:13, however, we read "*but* my Sabbaths you shall keep." Taking the word "akh" translated "but" to mean "merely," the passage is interpreted to signify that the rigorous law of the Sabbath is not to be observed, if such observance endangers life. This method of interpretation found its fullest development in the celebrated Rabbi Akibah, who in 135 C. E., died the martyr's death in the massacre of Jews under the Roman Emperor Hadrian.

Another method of interpretation is that known as "Juxtaposition," which signifies that the meaning of a law is sometimes explained by another law or passage either preceding or following it. In the treatise Yebamoth 49 a. treating of the Levirate marriage, it is said with reference to Deut. 23:3, reading "a bastard shall not enter the congregation of the Lord," that the word "bastard" signifies one born of incest or adultery, since the law in the first verse of the same chapter forbids an incestuous connection.

Another method of interpretation is found in the change of the reading of the text, which the commentators introduced by virtue of the fact that the text deprived of the vowel points might form an altogether different word, than that which tradition has authorized. In many of the instances coming under this head we

have the formula **אל תקרא** .... **אלא** "Do not read thus ....., but thus ....."

Allusion was made above to works which must be placed into the Talmudic period of Jewish history. These, too, should be considered in an attempt to give an explanation of the peculiar kind of interpretation carried on among Jews during almost ten centuries of Biblical activity. Some of these works have been lost. Others have been luckily preserved. Running parallel with the Mishnah we have first and foremost the "Tosefta" the "Supplement," a work intended to complete the deficiencies and omissions of the Mishnah. It contains the fragments of interpretations, for which some of the teachers living before and after the author of the Mishnah are responsible. The Tosefta is usually printed as an appendix to the Talmudic compendium of Alfazi (1013-1103).

The "Beraitha" was a work, which is known only from quotations made from it in other books. It consisted of laws and institutions which were not admitted into the Mishnah by the author of the Mishnah. Hence, the name "Beraitha" which signifies "that which is outside."

During the time of the Tanaim, a title applied to the teachers whose opinions are recorded in the Mishnah, the following books came into existence; Mekhilta, Sifra and Sifre, all Midrashic in character and treating of the last four books of the Pentateuch.

The Mekhiltah, the Aramaic equivalent for the Hebrew "Middah" measure, signifying in the Rabbinical dialect method of interpretation, and then collection of interpretations, is supposed to have originated in the

school of Rabbi Ishmael, about the second century of the common era. Its interpretations treat of Exodus and begin with the twelfth chapter, enjoining the observance of the Passover. It is both Halakhik and Ha-ggadic in character, and is often quoted by the Talmud and the post-Talmudic literature. An example will suffice to illustrate its style. Ex. 12: 3, reads **רְבִירוּ אֶל כָּל עֵרַת יִשְׂרָאֵל** "Speak ye unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel." With this passage, as a basis, the discussion carried on, is: Rabbi Ishmael says, "and did both Moses and Aaron speak to Israel? Was it not also stated 'and thou shalt speak to the children of Israel, saying' ? Why then does the text say 'speak ye' ?" The answer given to these queries is: When Moses spoke, Aaron listened with fear, and Scriptures regard his listening to Moses equivalent to his having heard the teaching from God Himself. Rabbi Achai b. Rabbi Jeshaiiah is then reported to have said: 'When Moses spoke, Aaron was at his right and Eleazar at his left. The word, therefore, came from between them, and it seemed as though the three spoke.'"

The Sifra, known also by the name "Torath Kohanim," law of the priests and quoted extensively in the Talmud, is the product of the school of Akibah, with additions from the school of Ishmael, and treats the book of Leviticus. It turns almost every word into a source for Halakha and contains comparatively little Haggadic matter. To illustrate it: Lev. 19: 18 reads **לֹא תִקֹּם** "thou shalt not bear vengeance." With reference to this passage the following statements are made. "What does vengeance signify? If one person says to another 'lend me your sickle,' and the owner does not lend it;

and if on the next day the owner of the sickle says to the other 'lend me your ax' and the owner of the ax answers, 'I will not loan my ax because you did not lend me your sickle.'"

The Sifre is a commentary on Numbers and Deuteronomy. The part on Numbers is not by the same author as the part on Deuteronomy, that on Numbers being more argumentative than the other, and, therefore, resembling the Sifra in many respects.

In this connection, it is well to refer to another book of these times which may also be regarded a running commentary to the Biblical books. I have in mind the "Seder Olam," literally "the order of the world," and constituting a chronology of Biblical history.

As there are works kindred to the Mishnah, there are works kindred to the Talmud, having come into existence either at the same time with the Talmud or after the Talmud, but showing a decided Talmudical flavor. The works referred to are the Midrashim, of which there is a large number. These are, for the most part, Haggadic and are more homiletical in character and only now and then exegetical by way of implication. The best-known Midrash is the Midrash Rabba, the great Midrash. It is called so because it opens with the explanation of a teacher entitled Rabbi Hoshaiah Rabba. The difference between the Midrash Rabba and other Midrashim is this, that in the Midrash Rabba every interpretation is based on a scriptural verse from some other book. The part treating of Genesis is no doubt a product of the fourth century. The following will illustrate the method of Midrashic interpretation. Gen. 2:20 reads: **לֹא זָכָר וְאִשָּׁה** "she shall be called woman,



because she was taken out of man." On this passage we find the comment, that from this is to be inferred that the law was given in the holy tongue and that the world was created in the holy language. Did you ever hear that man is called גוֹי (גוֹיִם) which would be allied to woman גִּיּוּיָא (גִּיּוּיָא) or that from אֶתְרוּפִי אֶתְרוּפִיא (ἀθροπία) is formed; or that from נָרָא the word נִבְרָא is formed for woman? And yet from אִישׁ the word אִשָּׁה is formed.

After the formation of the Midrash Rabba to Genesis, the Midrashic literature grew in volume. There came into existence the Pesiqta de Rab Kahanah, a Midrash on the special Scriptural lessons to be read in the synagogue on Sabbaths and feast days; the Midrash Rabba to Leviticus, and afterwards added to the entire work which goes by the name of Midrash Rabba; the Midrash Tanchuma, on the whole Pentateuch, called so because the major part is from the pen of a certain Rabbi Tanchuma, and also by the name of "Yelamdenu" he will teach us, or let him teach us, because the opening phrase is such, and believed by Zunz to be a product of the ninth century; the Pesiqta Rabbati, called so to distinguish it from the Pesiqta de Rab Kahanah; the Midrash Rabba to Deuteronomy, which Zunz also places into the ninth century; the Midrash Rabba to Numbers; the Midrash Rabba to Exodus; the Midrash to the five Biblical scrolls: Song of songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther; the Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, which contains fifty-four chapters, describes the most important events of the Pentateuch, and whose author lived about the eighth century; the Yalqut Shimoni on the twenty-four books of the O. T. whose author is unknown; the Yalqut

Ha Makiri on the twelve minor prophets, also of uncertain authorship; and finally the Midrash Haggadol, another great Midrash, product of the Middle Ages, similar in contents but not identical with the Midrash Rabba. Taking into consideration the details of the exegesis in vogue in the days of the formation of the Mishnah and Talmudic literature, one cannot help but infer that it must contain a great deal of valueless material; valueless from the truly exegetical point of view, however important it may be homiletically and ethically. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten, in passing judgment on the details of this literature, that Biblical research was conducted in the main for purposes of edification, that every verse was thought to be capable of many interpretations, and that only incidentally the text was expounded in the truly exegetical way, which aims to determine the correct reading, the historical allusion and the exact authorship. And again, though the "derash" the derived or forced explanation was popular and the "peshat" or natural meaning of a passage was not, as a rule, aimed at, we cannot close our eyes to the truth that some of the men, who produced the Midrashim were among the main workers in the field of the Masora, which established by means of the vowel points and punctuation, the correct reading of the Hebrew text of the Scriptures. Nor must we lose sight of the problems of authorship and of the valuable emendations which the Talmud discussed, allusions to which may be met in every modern Biblical commentary. Thus, for example, we find in the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrashim caution against the careless pronunciation and writing of similar letters of the Hebrew alphabet (in order to

avoid misunderstanding), indications of the special meanings of the various verbal forms in Hebrew, the mention of the fact that there is no chronological order in the Pentateuch and other scriptural books, the transposition of phrases, changes in the order of the words of the text, changes in reading, the separation of the various sections, explanations on the basis of etymology, the numerical value of the component letters of a word, the various shades of meaning which such a word as "ki" usually translated "for" has in the Hebrew, and many other points, helping the modern critic materially in making his discoveries.

A factor, running parallel to the Mishnah and Talmud, and yielding considerable material of exegetical value, from the Jewish point of view, is the variety of translations of the old Testament text and the discussions of Biblical and Jewish questions which came into existence from time to time during this period.

It makes no difference whether the translations in question are from the pens of Jews or non-Jews. In every single instance, where the non-Jew is responsible for the translation, the knowledge shown in the making of the translation was acquired from Jewish savants.

First and foremost let us consider the Targums, the Aramaic translations.

A very old, in fact the oldest translation of the Old Testament in Aramaic is the "Targum shel Kethubhim," the Targum of the Hagiographa. Thirty years before the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem, Rabbi Gamliel I knew of its existence, for he refers to the confiscation of the part dealing with the book of Job. This translation may have been embodied in another translation known as the Jerusalem Targum.

The Jerusalem Targum is a paraphrase to the three sections of the Old Testament. Of this only fragments are preserved. It was, in all probability, used as a basis for the works of Onqelos and Jonathan to be treated later. The language of the Jerusalem Targum is the Western Aramaic, and consists of a mixture of Hebrew, Syriac and Greek elements. It is influenced greatly by Greek thought and shows marked care in the explanation of anthropomorphic expressions.

E. g. Gen. 11:22, "And God created man" is rendered by the Jerusalem Targum, "And the word of the Lord created man."

Another Aramaic translation is the Targum Jonathan, called so because ascribed to a certain Jonathan b. Uziel, on the authority of the Talmud (Megillah 3a) where it is declared that Jonathan, son of Uziel, a disciple of Hillel, produced the Aramaic translation of the Prophets. It is also termed תרגום ריבן "our translation" as used by Palestinian Jews to distinguish it from the Babylonian Aramaic translation of Onqelos. Based on the Jerusalem Targum, its language is also the Western Aramaic. Its principal peculiarity is, that it is explanatory of the original text. The Targum Jonathan of the various parts of the Old Testament is not all by one author. That of the Pentateuch, however, is by one man. To illustrate its peculiarity just referred to, let us take the following passages:

a. Gen. 3: 6, "ye shall become like God" is rendered "like great angels."

b. Gen. 30: 2, "Am I in God's stead" is rendered "Instead of your asking it of me, ask it of God."

c. Lev. 19: 4, "Thou shalt not curse the deaf" is rendered "Do not curse him who does not hear."

d. Deut. 26: 9, "a land flowing with milk and honey." The Targum Jonathan renders this: "a land whose fruit is fat like milk and sweet as honey."

The Targum Jonathan, to the prophets consists of two recensions, one of very early date, and one more recent. The latter is given in the text known as Miqraoth Gedoloth.

And still another Aramaic translation is the Targum Onqelos. It is written in the Eastern Aramaic dialect, and is reported by the Talmud (Megillah 3a) to be the work of the Proselyte Onqelos. It covers only the Pentateuch. Its character is illustrated by the following passages:

Gen. 2: 24 reads, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother," which Onqelos rendered: "Everyone should leave the sleeping chamber of his father."

b. Gen. 4: 7, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" which Onqelos rendered, "If you improve your conduct, you will be forgiven."

c. Ex. 1: 22, "Every son that is born," Onqelos emended with the word ליהודא so that the passage reads "Every son that is born to the Jews."

d. In Ex. 3. 1 we have a complete change of diction. The phrase "the mountain of God," Onqelos rendered "the mountain, on which the glory of God revealed itself."

e. In Ex. 35: 31 the phrase, "the spirit of God" is rendered "the spirit of prophecy from God."

f. Num. 23: 19 reads "God is not a man that He should lie," which is rendered by Onqelos, "not like the words of men is the decree of God."

g. Deut. 20:19, "for the tree of the field is man's life" is rendered by Onqelos, "behold not like man is tree of the field."

In addition to the Aramaic translations we have the Greek translations:

a. The Septuagint. It certainly reflects the Jewish scholarship.

b. The Greek translation of Aquila. It is a liberal Greek rendering of the Old Testament text, is inferior to the LXX in diction, but is superior to it in accuracy, and reflects the scholarship of Jabneh. It is from the pen of the same Onqelos to whom the Targum Onqelos is ascribed. The other existing Greek versions, the Peshitta in Syriac and St. Jerome's Latin versions were all influenced by Jewish teachers and may be regarded as the avenues, through which much of the Jewish Biblical exegesis came down to us.

Two other sources of Biblical exegesis exist which have not been touched upon by us thus far. They are not translations, but works discussing subjects of a Biblical character. I refer to the works of Philo and Josephus. Philo may be called the representative of the Alexandrian Jewish Exegetes who, in his writings, paraphrases, Pentateuchal stories and institutions, gives a running commentary of the Biblical text, and attempts to prove that Greek philosophy may be employed to explain Biblical terms.

Josephus, who lived at the time of the siege of Jerusalem and witnessed the downfall of the Jewish state and nation, treats in the first part of his "Antiquities" many of the narrative portions of Scriptures, and hence may be justly regarded an interpreter of the Bible, in addition to being considered an historian.

The literature thus far mentioned comprises the first attempts made by Jews to explain the meaning of the Old Testament, as a whole, of its component books and separate passages.

Leaving the Talmudical period, in which, for the most part, the Midrashic method obtained, we encounter viewpoints which differ radically from those held by the Talmudic teachers and their contemporaries, although the more recent view points may have been, and in all likelihood were, built upon or evolved out of the Midrashic method. The causes which led to the change and the men who championed the more recent method of interpretation will constitute the subject of the next chapter.

## **KARAITES AND SAADIA**





## CHAPTER II

### THE KARAITES AND SAADIA

The year 500 of the Common Era marks the beginning of a new epoch, not only in the history of the Jewish people, but also in their literature. The view point of Jews, with regard to all subjects, had undergone a marvelous change, on account of changed cultural conditions. The Biblical exegesis which constituted their main pursuit, could by no means remain unaffected. That of the Talmudical period, treated in the previous chapter, had been the product of the schools of Palestine and Babylonia. In its creation, the Babylonian teachers certainly played the more prominent part, inasmuch as the Jewish centre of gravity had shifted from Palestine to Babylonia at an early date, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is true, Palestine could boast of prominent academies, established for the interpretation of Scriptures, but they could not compare, either in number or efficiency, with those which redounded to the glory of Babylonian Jewry.

In Babylonia, the Jews enjoyed, to a certain extent, political independence. While they were under the control of the Babylonian Government, they had, at their head, an "Exilarch" known by the Aramaic title, "Resh Geluthah." This dignitary, descendant as he was of the Davidic family, enjoyed the respect and acknowledgment of the State authorities. It is difficult to say, at what time this office was first created. Documentary evidence,

to some extent, warrants us in holding the opinion, that the office dates back to the time, when Babylon was a part of the Parthian Empire; that it continued during the rule of the Sassinades, and survived for several centuries during Arabic sway. One of the functions of the Exilarch was the appointment of judges. He had jurisdiction in criminal cases. He enjoyed special honor also in the Synagogue. A proof of the last mentioned fact is the circumstance, that the scroll of the law was carried to him during divine service, while all others had to approach the scroll, when the benediction over the scroll was to be recited by them. Enjoying the privilege of maintaining a Court, the Exilarch was permitted to levy taxes on the various provinces of Babylonia, in which the Jews resided.

Granted such political and religious autonomy, it was but natural for Jews to prefer to live in Babylonia, to living in Palestine, howsoever dear Palestine was to them, as the source of the holiest memories in their history. It was, therefore, that many Jews, who had been born and reared in Palestine, migrated, often at an advanced age, to Babylonia. As the Jewish population of Babylonia increased, the schools in Babylonia became more numerous than the Palestinean academies. They also acquired greater prominence, and, eventually, greater authority, in view of their superiority, dependent for the most part on the celebrity of their scholars. Two of these schools, more particularly, grew in influence. These schools were the academies of Sora and Pumbeditha. At the head of these schools were men who were known by the title, "Gaonim," literally, "the noble ones"; also termed the "Roshe Yeshibha," "heads

of the academy," a title which came into existence about the close of the sixth century.

The Gaonim constituted, in regular order of succession, the fourth class of savants whose lives were devoted to the study, teaching, and interpretation, not only of the law of Moses, but of the entire Bible. The four classes here referred to, are the following:

The first are the Tanaim—the teachers of the Mishnah.

The second are the Amoraim, the teachers of the Talmud, who interpreted the Mishnah.

The third are the Saboraim who edited the Talmud.

The fourth are the Gaonim, who in turn interpreted the Talmud, and based their religio-legal decisions on the Talmudic teachings.

Before men could rise to the prominent position of Gaon, they had to be elected by the academy. Their learning, howsoever great, was, by no means, the sesame, that opened for them the door to this scholastic prominence. Occasionally, however, they were appointed by the Exilarch, who communally stood above the Gaonim, and, whenever so appointed, they nevertheless remained altogether independent of him.

While both Sora and Pumbeditha had their Gaonim, the Gaon of Sora, in every single instance, occupied a higher position than the Gaon of Pumbeditha; in fact, if the Exilarch died, during the administration of a Gaon at Sora, the latter enjoyed the official income of the Exilarch, until another Exilarch was appointed. The Gaon of Sora undoubtedly owed his superior rank over his colleague in Pumbeditha, to the superiority of the school of Sora, and it was only when the school of Sora closed

its doors for all time to come, in the middle of the eleventh century, that the office of Gaon went out of existence.

In the field of Biblical exegesis, the Gaonim did not strike out along altogether new lines, until the middle of the seventh century. They rather continued with very slight variations, that Midrashic interpretation of Scriptures, marking the works of the Talmudic period. That eventually the Midrashic method of interpretation should have been abandoned, is not surprising. Valuable as the "derash" seemed to be, some of the interpretations of this character were carried to extremes, in the attempt to make every Biblical passage serve homiletical purposes. The interpretation of the law was at times, so far fetched and so fanciful, that it was sure to meet with opposition. The Bible itself, on account of the Midrashic method, was made secondary to its interpretation. Some of the teachers began to realize that the Talmud was, on this account, supplanting the Bible, in the estimation of the people. The undue reverence for the Talmud, at the expense of the Scriptures, had to be overcome. A movement was, therefore, set on foot to reinstate the Bible into its proper place. This movement was inaugurated by no obscure individual, who hailed from some out-of-the-way place, but by one who belonged to the distinguished family of the Exilarch.

In order to understand thoroughly the influence which the originator of the movement just referred to, exercised, it may be well to consider him in the light of his social rank. The Exilarch Solomon had died without issue, in 761, and the office was to have been conferred on his nephew, Anan ben David. Anan ben David was

deemed unfit for the position. There was personal objection to him. He was presumptuous and overbearing, while his brother, on the other hand, was unassuming and modest. He also manifested a decided lukewarmness towards traditional Judaism; a lukewarmness amounting almost to disdain. What made him indifferent towards the traditions of his people was his long sojourn in the Persian Mesopotamian borderlands, where he was not only not under the influence of the prevailing Jewish thought, but also where he did not remain altogether unaffected by the propaganda of the Islam.

At his time, the weak remnants of Sadduceism and Essenism, which dated their origin back as far as the second century before the Christian Era, made themselves felt once more, amid the counter currents which were sweeping across Jewish thought.

Keenly disappointed because not elected Exilarch, Anan ben David allowed himself to be proclaimed Anti-Exilarch. Jewish politics, despite the comparative Jewish independence, was not altogether unwatched by the State authorities. Whenever differences arose within the Jewish fold, the State authorities took a leading part in the settlement. The Mohammedan Caliphs, having learned of Anan's determination to rule as Exilarch, had him arrested, threw him into prison, and would have had him executed, had he not followed the advice of a fellow prisoner, founder of the great Mohammedan Casuists, the Hanafites, who counselled him to interpret all ambiguous and doubtful precepts of the law in a manner directly opposed to the traditional interpretation, and thus found a new religious sect. The Jews were looked

upon as "unbelievers" by the Mohammedans, and it was felt, that if Anan were supposed to differ from the Jews, as known to the Caliphate, the Caliphate would look with favor upon the new sect, and its founder. Anan accepted the advice. He was set free, and won not only the connivance, but also the support of the Mohammedan authorities. No sooner set free, than he devoted himself to the promotion of his new cause. He went to Palestine and built a synagogue at Jerusalem, in which the ritual in vogue was different from that known in the synagogues recognized by Rabbinical authority. Realizing that he was looked upon in the light of a dissenter, Anan's hostility toward the Gaonate and his animosity against the Talmud continued to grow more intense. The remark is ascribed to him: "I wish that all the adherents of the Talmud were in my body, so that by killing myself I would at the same time kill them." He did not hesitate to accuse the Talmudists, including, of course, the Midrashic interpreters of Scriptures, of having corrupted Judaism, of having added to the Torah many things not warranted by the text, and of having disregarded some of the more important institutions, which should be considered bone and sinew of Israel as a people and of its religious life. The motto, which guided Anan was, "Seek the Scriptures industriously." His battle cry seemed to be, "Back to the Bible." In contradistinction to the Talmudists, called "Rabbinites," because adhering to that Rabbinical tradition, supposed to explain the law and its intent, the followers of Anan ben David are known in history as the Karaites (Keraim, Baale Mikra, Bene Mikra), followers of the Bible, and the movement represented by

them was termed Karaism. Anan is reported to have expounded his views concerning religious commandments and prohibitions, in three works, one of which was a commentary to the Pentateuch. These works have unfortunately been lost. The later development of the Karaitic movement, however, showed that Anan took so bold a stand against Talmudic exposition that he went to unwarranted extremes in his method, which consisted of the literal exposition of Scriptures. Opposed as he was to Rabbinical tradition, he did not steer clear entirely of the method of the Rabbinites. He fell into the very net, from the meshes of which he endeavored to extricate himself. Thus, for example, he made use of the Mishnic rules of interpretation, in deducing the new laws of his religion. Among the many things that he effected, are the following: He abolished the fixed calendar, which had been in vogue for five centuries. Being a literalist, he in some instances, outdid the Rabbinites in rigorousness. This is evident in the observances of the Sabbath, the laws regarding food forbidden to be eaten, and the institution of marriage. Things that he forbade were the laying of the Phylacteries, the use of the festal plants on the Feast of Tabernacles, and the celebration of the Feast of Dedication. He changed also the cycle of Scriptural reading for the Sabbaths.

Justification as there may have been, to some extent, in the Karaitic movement, it must not be forgotten that the literalism of interpretation made for a point which was equalled in danger only by the extreme to which Rabbinism had gone before the advent of Anan. Nor must it be forgotten that the natural changes, which are brought about in the culture of a people, during cen-



turies of existence, and which form the force known as tradition, are the determining elements in the development of the cause the people may represent. And yet, extravagant as Karaism may have been, and anxious as it was to bring about a revolution against an ingenuity run riot in the method of Talmudical interpretation, it must be conceded that Karaism gave to Biblical criticism, as it did to Judaism, a healthy stimulus for Bible study, along more careful and rational lines, even in circles beyond its own territory. Although Karaism divided the Jewish people into two factions, a cleavage which since the time of Anan has not been repaired, it proved a blessing in disguise. Nor was Karaism simply a temporary phenomenon. Because of the novelty of its thought, and its revolutionary tendency against Talmudism, Karaism made many converts during the first centuries of its existence, in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Babylonia, and Persia. In course of time, it extended even to the Byzantine Empire, and about the thirteenth century it made its way into Russia, where almost all the living exponents of the movement are confined.

In the century and a half following Anan, Karaism produced no prominent work in the field of Biblical exegesis. Among those who devoted themselves to the work are the following: Benjamin Nahawendi, who applied the allegorical method of exposition, in a manner resembling that of Philo; Judghan of Hamadan, known as Judah the Persian, who expounded the theory that the law had both exoteric and esoteric significance; Hivi of Balkh, who attempted to criticize the subject matter of the Bible, on rational grounds, and claimed to have discovered two hundred reasons, both historical and legal, against the authenticity of the Pentateuch.

The bulk of exegetical literature produced by Karaites, came into existence several centuries later, and was inspired by the example of Rabbinism, which was all this time producing important exegetical literature. It is not necessary, in this connection, to give the names of the Karaitic Biblical exegetes, living several centuries after Anan. Suffice it to say, that their literary works are commentaries on the Pentateuch and other Biblical books, and treatises on the grammar of the Hebrew language. However, it is no more than just to state that the Karaites of the tenth and eleventh centuries, who contributed to Biblical exegeses, rendered, at times, valuable service, since at this late day, the animosity of Karaism against Rabbinism had become considerably mitigated, and the judgment of Karaites had become calmer.

While Rabbinism had a greater number of followers than Karaism, it, by no means, looked with indifference upon the new movement. Rabbinism regarded it as it would every other revolutionary power, in the light of an enemy, which, in all probability, would, in course of time, become a formidable rival. Rabbinism, therefore, felt itself called upon to answer the charges made against it, and reconstruct, if this were necessary, the Midrashic element of interpretation, which had been so carefully developed during ten centuries of scholastic activity. Rabbinism was prepared to acknowledge its weaknesses. It was willing to remedy its faults. It preferred reconstruction to seeing traditions suffer the complete loss of respect and confidence among the people.

Towards the close of the ninth century, the first champion of the new interpretation of Rabbinism made his appearance. The man, to whom reference is made, is

Saadia ben Joseph, who was born in the City of Fayum, in upper Egypt, in 892, and died in 942 at the age of fifty.

Very little is known about his youth and education. Numerous conjectures exist as to the identity of his teachers. One man supposes him to have been the disciple of a certain Abu Kathir; another believes him to have sat at the feet of the Karaite, Salman ben Jerucham, against whom he, later in life, waged bitter war. The works he wrote, however, indicate that for the time in which he lived, his education was a many sided one. He was not only master of the Hebrew language and all the literature written in it, but also the master of the Arabic tongue. He devoted himself to philosophy and familiarized himself thoroughly with the sacred literature of Christianity and Islam. His reputation soon spread from his native country to the center of Jewish life. Probably he never dreamed in his youth, of being promoted to the dignity of Gaon. His superiority, however, soon won for him this exalted position. In 928 he was elected to become the head of the school of Sora, because of the very qualities which his opponent claimed rendered him unfit for the position. It was held that, while Saadia surpassed all his contemporaries in wisdom, piety, and eloquence, his very independent spirit made him shrink from no undertaking. It was regarded an exceptional instance for an Egyptian Jew, who had not been reared in the Talmudic atmosphere of the Babylonian schools, to be called to preside over the academy of Sora. Philosopher as Saadia was, he added to the already very great glory of that Babylonian academy. Sora soon became known, through him, not only for its Tal-

mudic, but also for its philosophical disciplines. As he added to the splendor of Sora, the school of Pumbeditha continued to suffer a gradual loss of its former greatness. Saadia's praiseworthy independence against the Exilarch David, who wanted him to act contrary to the dictates of his conscience, induced David to depose him, whereupon Saadia turned upon David, and deposed the latter. Two factions thus arose in Babylonia, among the Rabbinites, each of which applied to the Caliphate for intercession. In response to bribes, David was endorsed by the Caliph. Saadia, nevertheless, asserted his authority as Gaon, and it was only upon the death of the Caliph, when money again began to pour from David's purse into the coffers of the new ruler, that Saadia was compelled to live in Bagdad in retirement for four years.

Saadia was a prolific writer on every subject in which he had received training. He produced an Arabic translation of the Pentateuch and the other Biblical books, with a commentary written also in Arabic. The only books extant are the Pentateuch, Isaiah, Psalms, Proverbs, and fragments of the Book of Job. In his translation he figures as the exponent of the "Peshat," "the simple explanation," combining in the same, reason and tradition. This translation was, therefore, also explanatory, without possessing the character of the paraphrase. In the introduction to this work, Saadia states that he underakes the task upon the request of many for a translation of the Torah, with special reference to the linguistic sense, in order to make the Torah more intelligible to the people. His philosophical work, entitled "Sefer Ha-emunoth Vedeoth" on the philosophy of religion, and his commentary on the book of Creation, "Sefer Yezi-

rah" must be mentioned also in this connection, as throwing light on the many passages of Scriptures which required exegetical explanation. The linguistic treatises he left, also, are worthy of note here. That of special interest is the "Sefer Lashon Ivri," a book on the Hebrew language, in which he treats details of Hebrew grammar. Two other books of interest, from his pen, are the one on "Hapax-legomena," and the other on the "Elegance of the Hebrew Language," "Sefer Zechuth." Saadia figures as champion of that rational traditionalism in interpretation, for which the conditions of the times called. Reason is with him the basis of Scriptural exegesis. He claims that the exposition of the Bible must contain nothing that is obscure, or nothing that contradicts logic. His interpretation is not limited by the reproduction of simple words and sentences, but takes into consideration the "Tendenz" of the books as entireties, and the relation in which the component chapters of books, stand to one another. He believed in miracles and the divine origin of the Bible. He took into account the collateral authority of Scriptures themselves, as a source of exegesis, and did not fail to lay stress upon the authority of tradition. Saadia followed the examples of the Targums, in the explanation of anthropomorphisms. The understanding of his translation was promoted by his invariable attempt not to permit the obscure to remain, and because he used Arabic words for expressions of the Bible, which, while they were not altogether warranted by the text, made the text clear. It is on this score that Ibn Ezra criticized him, as well as for his habit of giving terms connotations not warranted by their real meaning.

The point to which special attention should be directed in the exegesis of Saadia, is his theory, that in the Bible we have frequent ellipses. Thus, for example, in his commentary, where he speaks of the law of the half-shekel, commanded in Exodus 30:11-16, we find him saying that in Chronicles 5:6 and 9, between the words "Masath" and "Mosheh," the word "Am" should be supplied, so that the text would read, "The numbering of the people of Moses." He claims that there are ten ellipses in the Bible, which must be supplied after the verb "Nasa" "to lift up." As pioneer of an exegesis independent of the iron-clad traditional Midrashic thought, Saadia soon won many followers, both among his contemporaries and his immediate successors. These are Samuel ben Chofni (who died 1034) and who follows Saadia in his explanation of the Pentateuch, although adhering to the Hebrew text more strictly than Saadia; Aaron Ibn Sargado, head of the school of Pumbeditha, who was the author of a commentary on the Pentateuch; the Gaon Hai, Isaac Israeli; Jehudah Karoisch, Chananel ben Chushiel, of whose Pentateuchal commentary many examples have been preserved; Nissim ben Jacob, and Sabbathai Donnolo. With the end of Saadia's life, the Babylonian schools drew to their close. One of the last of the more prominent Gaonim was Sherrira, and the last was the Gaon Hezekiah, executed by order of the Caliph. The decline of the school of Sora was no doubt the result of the antagonism of the Moham-medans and the differences between the Jewish scholars of those days. When, in 1036, the last Gaon was cruelly removed from his office, the scholars of Babylonia were scattered, and Babylonia no longer continued as the seat

of Jewish learning. Jewish activity shifted to other quarters, and with the shifting of Jewish activity into another environment, the Biblical exegesis among Jews, took on a new shape and a new color.

**GRAMMARIANS  
AND  
LEXICOGRAPHERS**





## CHAPTER III

### GRAMMARIANS AND LEXICOGRAPHERS

That was a sorrowful day when the schools of Sora and Pumbeditha were obliged to close their doors, never again to be reopened for the reception of students and the study of the law under the guidance of celebrated scholars. As, at one time, the people did not deem it possible for Israel to survive, without the ownership of Palestine and Israel's separate existence as a nation, so, in the days of the Babylonian academies, the conviction was general, that Biblical knowledge could thrive only under Babylonian skies. Little did men dream, that in the far off Spanish Peninsula, the work, so conscientiously begun and faithfully cultivated in the East, would be successfully continued, and that too, by men not possessing less enthusiasm for, and perseverance in the study of the Law, than their Palestinean and Babylonian predecessors.

Spain had been inhabited by Jews during the early Christian centuries. The life of these early Jewish settlers was anything but an enviable one. They were exposed to constant proscriptions and persecutions. Not until the conquest of Spain by the Mohammedans in the beginning of the Eighth Century, when spurred on by African co-religionists to ally themselves with the Moors, did a period of comparative prosperity and ease dawn for the Jews, who had taken up their residence in Spain. That the superior advantages enjoyed by Spanish Jews

should have attracted to Spain, Jews from other countries, is a circumstance requiring but little special punctuation. From this time on, Spain became the New Jerusalem, not simply because it offered a home to "the tribe of the wandering foot," but also because from it issued "the law and the word of God."

The manner in which the learning of the East chanced to be transplanted to the West, is one of the most interesting incidents in the history of those days. When the school of Sora was rapidly declining and its end seemed near, its teachers desired to make one last effort to prevent its disintegration. In the year 948, four teachers were, therefore, delegated to cross the Mediterranean Sea and address themselves to several communities for subsidies to be voted the most prominent seat of Jewish learning then in existence. The four teachers in question embarked on the same vessel, which was captured by the Spanish-Arabic Admiral, Ibn Rumahis. One of the teachers, Shemaryah, was sent to Alexandria; Chushiel to Cyrene; Nathan ben Isaac Cohen to Narbonne; and Moses to Cordova. With the infiltration of the Babylonian Jewish influence, the Jews of Spain were roused to a consciousness and appreciation of their valuable opportunity. Everything favored their becoming the main champions of, and the most valuable contributors to the science of Jewish thought. The common schools were not closed to them, nor did the higher seats of learning bar them from the knowledge these were dispensing. All the sciences and arts welcomed Jews, as promoters, provided they had talent requisite for their mastery. Social equality with the Moors also was not denied them. Finding Moorish activity to be devoted

to the field of Arabic grammar, the Spanish Jews soon became mastered by an ambition to be active in the field of Hebrew grammatical research. Many a person felt that the proper definition of Hebrew terms, the proper use of various parts of Hebrew speech, and the proper syntactical correlation of sentences, were not yet thoroughly understood, even by those who used the Hebrew, both in their daily speech and in their literary undertakings; and that Biblical exegesis would certainly be aided materially, if Hebrew in these various aspects were better understood. Never, in all the history of Israel, did the future seem to hold out richer promises than were held out to Jews in the days constituting the Tenth Century. Former generations had, it is true, produced celebrities whose names became enveloped by the rich halo of immortality. These days, however, produced stars of a higher magnitude on the horizon of Jewish scholarship, than had ever been attained before this era. Men who built wisely on the traditions of the past, and, at the same time, did not fail to avail themselves of the valuable researches made by the Moors; men who may be declared to have separated the dross of the fanciful from the purer metal of truth; men who broke the fetters binding their co-religionists to the unreasonable, and won the freedom of scientific speculation; men who may be regarded as the deliverers, rescuing Jewish exegesis from total stagnation, are the promising children of this age, in the development of Jewish culture.

The first authority to claim our attention is Joseph Ibn Abitur, who was born in the year 905 at Merida, and died at Damascus, in 970. The place of his activity was attractive Cordova, where he was a disciple of the Baby-

lonian Rabbi Moses, who had been sent out to collect contributions for the school of Sora. Upon the death of his teacher, Abitur was a rival candidate, with his teacher's son, for the Rabbinate of Cordova. His failure to get that high office, filled him with keen disappointment, and although he afterwards could have been made the Rabbi of this Spanish metropolis, and could have had his teacher's son deposed, he was perfectly willing to deny himself that honor. Although engaged, in the main, in writing liturgical poetry for the synagogue, much of which has found its way into the ritual still in use, and which shows him to have had a deep insight into the beauties of the sacred tongue, his activity was, by no means, limited to this class of literature. Talmudist as he was, he could not help but be influenced by the Talmudic spirit, in his endeavor to establish the correct sense of Scriptures. He must have written extensively on the Biblical books, in spite of the fact that only fragments of his Commentary on the Book of Psalms have come down to us. His diction is tinged with Aramaisms, and the peculiarity distinguishing him from his predecessors in the field of exegesis, is that he coined many new Hebrew words, and thus increased the already great wealth of the Hebrew vocabulary.

The man with whom the florescence of Andalusian culture began, and who won for himself unsurpassed fame in the history of dispersed Jewry, is Chasdai Ibn Shaprut. He saw the light of day at Jaen in the year 915, and died at Cordova in 990. Being of wealthy parentage, nothing was spared to give him a many-sided education in the classics and sciences of that day. His acquaintance with Hebrew, Arabic and Latin was all-

embracing, and his eminence in the medical profession was so marked that after the discovery of a panacea, he was made physician to the then ruling Caliph. He also took an active part in the settlement of diplomatic relations between Spain and foreign powers, thus winning for himself the appreciation and gratitude of his countrymen. It was he, through whose influence, Rabbi Moses ben Enoch, interested in the restoration of the academy of Sora, became the director of the destinies of Cordova's Jews, and who made of Andalusia a second Babylonia. While there are no works extant, from Chasdai's pen, which directly help to promote the understanding of Scriptures, it is asserted that he could not have been altogether idle in this sphere. Some men are the powers behind thrones. They are the sources of other people's inspiration. They do the thinking and guiding. They call attention to noteworthy facts, and lend to the undertakings of others, wealth-producing suggestions. Such a man Chasdai undoubtedly was. We know him to have been in correspondence, not only with the King of the Chazars, who constituted a separate Jewish State in the East, but also with the men of whom we shall now treat, and to whom, by means of his correspondence, he, with the treasure house of his Hebrew erudition, must have been of invaluable assistance, in the prosecution of their grammatical undertakings.

Cordova being the center of Andalusian Jewish culture, it naturally succeeded in attracting into its precincts, unparalleled for inspiration, scholars from every other city in the Spanish Peninsula. One of the scholars, thus attracted, was Menahem ben Saruk, born at Tortosa in 910. He came to Cordova at an early age,

and upon his arrival in that metropolis, was befriended not only by Chasdai's father, but also by Chasdai himself. Menahem's forte was philology. It was claimed for him that he understood thoroughly the laws that are basic to the structure of languages, and could account, with ease, for the causes that give rise to distinct linguistic phenomena. Encouraged by Chasdai, Menahem undertook the production of a dictionary of the Hebrew language, to which he gave the name, "Machbereth," "the key." It was the first complete work of its kind. While the need may have been felt before his day for a lexicon of Hebrew terms contained in the Bible, no one had, as yet, ventured upon so gigantic and, therefore, formidable an undertaking. The theories he advanced in his work were rather strange from our point of view, and, therefore, remained by no means unattacked. His most bitter critic was his contemporary, Dunash. He, too, as we shall see later on, could lay claim to profound grammatical knowledge, and to a pronounced linguistic talent. His strictures on Menahem's work were so severe and thorough-going, that they made Menahem lose not only the good will, but also the friendship of Chasdai, his disillusioned devoted patron. Menahem never took the occasion to defend himself against his assailant, but left it to his pupils to plead his cause before the tribunal of scholarship. While Menahem does not evidence exact knowledge of the forms of the Hebrew language, he nevertheless recognized that the language was governed by definite rules. In the explanations he gave for Hebrew terms, he frequently employed the terminology of the Arabic grammarians, although that terminology, because of differences in connotation was not al-

ways applicable. Menahem did not know anything of the theory of tri-literal stems, in the Hebrew language, and, if he was aware of it, he completely ignored it. He believed not only in bi-literal, but also in uni-literal roots. That, therefore, he should have arrived at some of the strangest conclusions as to the meaning of Biblical texts, requires no special proof for one acquainted with the Hebrew language on the basis of the tri-literal theory. A point worthy of note, in connection with Menahem's theory, is the principle that strange words in the Bible may be explained best in the light of their context. For this purpose Menahem employs the structure of Biblical poetry and rhetoric. Whereas much that Menahem advocated has been overthrown, he certainly is entitled to a prominent place among the literary men of his time, on account of the impetus he gave to the study of Hebrew. And had he lived longer than 960, who knows but what he might have seen the error of his theories, and thus put Biblical scholars under greater obligations to him than he did.

We have already mentioned the name of Dunash, who attacked Menahem. This Dunash is known by the name, Dunash Ibn Labrat. He was born in Bagdad in the year 920, and devoted himself, more particularly, to the study of philology, like Menahem, the object of his severe criticism. While still a young man, he found his way into Spain. He, like hundreds of others, was attracted to beautiful and fascinating Andalusia. He knew that his talents would thrive in that healthful atmosphere of culture, for which Andalusia was famed. He felt that there his soul could soar to dreamed-of heights, amid the freedom which the Moors held out to



every student. Having studied Arabic, he soon began to trace the resemblances and differences between the Arabic language and its sister tongue, the Hebrew. Nor is he a poet of mean order. Studied in the light of a singer, he is regarded the founder of a new Hebrew meter, patterned after an Arabic model. It was the "Machbereth" of Menahem, which gave Dunash the greatest opportunity for the display of his specific talent. Unwelcome as Dunash's criticism of Menahem was, he justified it on the ground of his conviction that Menahem was wrong, and that it is the duty of wise men to correct one another, in spite of the fact, that it is claimed that Dunash would not have been so severe in his criticism, had he not desired to ingratiate himself with Chasdai, and thus displace Menahem in Chasdai's affections. In the introduction to his criticism, Dunash treats of the various classes of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the parts of speech, inflections, various kinds of sentences, the syntactical relations of clauses, the peculiarities of the Biblical text, synonyms, words written "plene" and "defective," superfluous letters, euphemistic expressions, the Aramaic and Arabic languages, and the thirteen traditional rules of Biblical exegesis. Dunash's main contention is that Hebrew words can be traced back to tri-literal stems, only sometimes to bi-literal, but never to uni-literal stems. As Dunash had criticised Menahem, so he also criticised the Gaon Saadia, in a work which has come down to us in fragmentary form. On the death of the two opponents, Menahem and Dunash, their disciples continued for some time to array themselves in hostile attitude against one another, seeking at one another's expense, honors on the battlefield of grammatical research.

To one of the men taking an active part in this warfare, attention must needs be directed. We refer to Juda ben David Chayyug, a grammarian born in Morocco in 950. Having moved to Cordova, he became a pupil of Menahem, and took up the cause of his teacher against Dunash. Well versed in Arabic grammatical literature, he applied the methods of Arabic grammarians, to the explanation of Hebrew grammar. His predecessors had often had difficulty in accounting for differences between strong and weak verbs. Chayyug solved the problem. He held that all Hebrew stems are tri-literal, and that if one letter does not appear in a given form, it may be regarded as quiescent in one way or other. This theory he expounded in a work entitled, "A Book of Verbs Containing Weak Letters." The work consists of three parts. The first part treats of verbs in which the first radical is a weak letter; the second part of verbs in which the second radical is a weak letter, and the third part of verbs in which the third radical is a weak letter. He also wrote a treatise on verbs containing double letters, that is, such in which the second and third radicals are the same; two treatises on punctuation, expounding the principles fundamental to the Masoretic use of vowels and consonants; another treatise, entitled "The Book of Extracts," in which he discusses verbal stems in the order in which they occur in the Bible. The influence Chayyug exerted upon Hebrew grammarians, was so epoch-making, that it is still felt to-day by men devoting themselves to the promotion of Hebrew grammar, because the knowledge they present, is for the most part, based upon the discoveries of Chayyug.

One of the first men who felt the influence of Chayyug's grammatical discoveries was Abulwalid, born in Cordova towards the close of the Tenth Century. He spent a part of his youth in Lucena. Whether he was a pupil of Chayyug, is not certain. The fact remains, however, that he revered Chayyug deeply, and valued his discoveries. Although Abulwalid was a physician and wrote medical works, he devoted himself most assiduously to the study of the Hebrew language, in order to unravel by means of his knowledge the intent of Scriptures. His works were not written in Cordova. On account of political difficulties, he was obliged to flee that city, and only after wandering about for a long time, did he settle in Saragosa, where he wrote his works. His first treatise was "The Supplement," which, as its name indicates, supplements the treatise of Chayyug on weak verbs. He tells us that he had read the Scriptures eight times, and explains some odd fifty roots, not treated by Chayyug. Nor does he always agree with Chayyug. He wrote another book entitled "The Awakening," which is in the nature of a reply to an anonymous attack made upon him, on the ground that he, in criticising Chayyug, had forgotten some of Chayyug's mistakes. In this reply Abulwalid gives valuable grammatical observations. In the polemics, which subsequently were carried on between himself and Samuel Ibn Nagdela, many obscure points in Hebrew grammar are expounded. Abulwalid's principal work was "The Critical Investigation," consisting of two parts; the first treating of the grammar of the language, the second being a vocabulary.

The most celebrated contemporary and rival of Abulwalid, in the field of grammatical research, was Samuel

ben Joseph Ibn Nagdela, called also "Samuel Hanagid." He was born in Cordova, in 993, and died at Granada 1055. He, like all other great men of that day, enjoyed a thorough linguistic training. Arabic caligraphy is reported to have been one of the disciplines, for which he showed special aptitude. Some of the letters he wrote in his artistic style fell into the hands of the ruling Vizier. At first, in consequence of the admiration of his letters, he was made the private secretary of the Vizier, and afterwards, upon the death of that official, King Habus raised him to the office held by his patron. Although exalted to the position of a Prince, he continued his studies among the Jews of Granada. He was the Nagid, or chief, the Rabbinical authority, and the intercessor or representative of his co-religionists. He was the friend of all students, who sought culture, and afforded them the means for their education. He believed in making knowledge as abundant as are the waters which cover the sea. In his estimation, only knowledge, and nothing else, was power. Of the writings of Samuel but few have come down to us. One of these is his introduction to the Talmud. Another is the fragment of a work entitled "Ben Mishle," containing aphorisms and maxims. Another is a collection of philosophical meditations, known by the name of "Ben Qoheleth." His principal grammatical work is "Sefer Ha-Osher," no longer in existence. In it, he went beyond the principles laid down by Chayyug. Citations of this work are found in Ibn Ezra, which indicate the independence of Samuel's thought. An example of his theories is the following. He claims that the verbs like "Nathan" (to give) and "Laqach" (to take) are not tri-consonantal,

but bi-consonantal. The forms, "Yutan" (Lev. 11 : 38) and "Yuqach" (Isaiah 49 : 25) are not to be regarded "Hophal" forms, but passives of the "Qal."

These are the characters who may be considered, with justice, the links between the phase of Biblical interpretation, developed in Palestine, and that other phase, which made its appearance in the Eleventh Century, in Western and Southwestern Europe. These men, by virtue of the grammar and lexicography cultivated by them, in which they were influenced by the example of Arabic grammarians, were the natural forerunners of that exegetical age, in the more modern sense of the term, which was about to dawn. They, no doubt, felt that in order to be able to understand the literature of a language, the structure and syntax of the language must be thoroughly mastered. They lived themselves into the spirit of the ancient Hebrew, and, thus, not only put themselves into the position of discovering for themselves, the intent of the Scriptures, but also enabled the critics of later days to give those explanations of the Biblical text, for which they, in their turn, received a prominent place in the history of Bible exegesis.

## **RASHI AND THE TOSSAFISTS**



## CHAPTER IV

### RASHI AND THE TOSSAFISTS

Spain was, beyond all doubt, the most prolific country in the production of Jewish literature during the middle ages. In fact, as long as the Jew was permitted to reside within its borders, he continued to add from day to day to the already extensive storehouse of literary treasures, the foundation of which was laid by the grammarians and lexicographers treated in the previous chapter. Even during the days of Jewish persecutions, instituted by the church, after the expulsion of Moors from the Spanish Peninsula, master-minds followed faithfully that line of research opened by Arabic savants.

But Spain was not the only country where men of light and leading were spurred on to take up the grateful task of interpreting the relation of Jewish thought to the prevailing thought of the world of that time and of unfolding (because Jewish thought was based upon Biblical thought) the intent and purpose of Scriptures. The influence of Moors extended beyond the Pyrenees. These mountains separated the countries only physically from one another. The peoples residing in the several lands on both sides of the mountain chain could not help but be moulded by the civilization for which the neighboring nations stood. The Renaissance, for which the never-to-be-forgotten Moors were responsible, both in the sciences and the arts, swept everything before it. France, nearest neighbor to the North, could not resist



the Moorish revolutionary culture, to the potency of which the people of other European domains perforce succumbed. French Jews were quick to feel the magic touch, which gave both new and bright tone and color to the researches carried on by their Spanish co-religionists. The French Jews were, furthermore, prepared for the dawn of a new epoch in the realm of their religious literature. It is to France, therefore, that our attention shall be directed, more especially because in the field of Biblical exegesis, chronological treatment of interpreters is of great importance in tracing the development of Jewish exegesis as a science. Although in those days, the means of communication between peoples living at great distances from one another were not those of railroad and telegraph, thought, nevertheless, rushed like mighty air currents from one section of the world to another and in every instance, left behind perceptible traces of its clarifying work.

France, like Spain, was inhabited by Jews in the early centuries of the Christian Era, despite the many and stringent church laws enacted against them, denying them privileges that should have been theirs, as children of God. Instances in point are the decree of the Council of Macon (581), forbidding the appointment of Jews as judges and tax collectors; the decree of the Council of Paris (614), prohibiting Jews from exercising civic rights over Christians; and the decree of the Council of Narbonne, interdicting the singing of Psalms by Jews at the burial of their own dead. Proscriptions against Jews continued to be formulated until the time of Charlemagne, when their life in France, fortunately, for a time, at least, became more bearable and continued thus

until the reign of Amulo, in the middle of the ninth century, with whose advent to the throne, suffering again became the badge of Jews. It was in the eleventh century that the Viscount of Narbonne, happily prevented in his district, at least, the massacre of Jews by the Crusaders, who, without mercy, killed Jews, as they did the Moors of Spain.

Narbonne was one of the largest, if not the largest community of France. In the year 948, Nathan ben Isaac Cohen, one of the four teachers sent from Sora to collect funds to prevent the extinction of that school, was brought thither by his Spanish-Arabic captor. His learning was soon recognized. It was felt that he possessed power, of which no man living in the West could justly boast. Until these days, the Occident could not compare in point of Jewish scholarship with the dying Orient. It was, therefore, that teachers, hailing from Babylonia, were welcomed as guides and directors of European countries. As Rabbi Moses had lent dignity and promise to Cordova and made it the most prominent Spanish seat of Jewish learning, so Rabbi Nathan raised Narbonne out of its obscurity to heights of scholarship, which it perhaps never dreamed of occupying. Among the scholars of that century was the grammarian, Talmudist and great Rabbinical authority, Rabbenu Gershon, called "The Light of the Exile," who hailed from Metz, had a school in Mayence and while a German in spirit, nevertheless influenced the thought of France through his French pupils (who came to listen to his instruction), and through his correspondence conducted with the French Rabbis. The man through whom, in all probability, he moulded French Jewish thought most

was Rashi. Although not his pupil, Rashi enjoyed the benefit of Gershon's method and theories by way of inheritance from an uncle. "Rashi" is an abbreviation, consisting of the initials of the words, "Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac." Sometimes he is called "Parshandatha," literally signifying "Interpreter of the Law." He was born in 1040, in the city of Troyes, the same year that Rabbenu Gershon died, and it has been often remarked that he was ushered into the world in order to make good the loss the world sustained by the demise of Gershon. It is erroneously claimed at times, that Rashi hailed from Lunel. Tradition also holds that he was a lineal descendant of the great Talmudic scholar, Jochanan Hassandler. And another legend asserts that he was a native of Worms in Germany, where—in the wall of the synagogue, the people still point to a concavity, produced by the pressure of Rashi's mother, who, while pregnant with him, pressed against the wall to prevent herself from being run down by a wagon, driven through the narrow lane, for the express purpose of bringing about her death. Despite these several legends, the fact remains that he was born on French soil in the city of Troyes, was the Rabbi of that community, only visited Worms, and probably taught the law there on the occasion of his visit, in the chapel adjoining the synagogue, called the Rashi Chapel, but never lived in Worms permanently, any more than he did in Prague or in some of the African and Asiatic Jewish centers to which his travels extended. Rashi took charge of the spiritual destinies of the Jews of his native city at the age of twenty-five, upon his return from the Jewish seats of learning he visited in Germany. He witnessed the be-

ginning of the first Crusade in 1095, in the atrocities of which he lost some of his dearest relatives and best friends. The year 1105 marks his death. Never in all the history of the Jewish people did scholar live, who gave evidence of greater industry and perseverance than Rashi displayed. Apart from the fact that he mastered the composite learning of his day and gave the result of his researches to the world, not only in the training of numerous disciples, but also in the creation of a monumental commentary to the Bible, he wrote a commentary to the Mishnah and Talmud, as a rule printed on the inner margin of folio volumes, alongside of the text, as is the case with his commentary on the Bible. Of this commentary on the Talmud, but one word need be said in order to appreciate its great value. The Talmudic text is unintelligible without the light thrown upon it by Rashi's explanation. Had it not been for the services rendered by Rashi in this direction, the Talmud, in all probability, would have remained a work closed with seven seals. It shows him to have possessed not only marked familiarity with the Talmudic idiom, often obscure in the extreme because of its terseness, but also a thorough acquaintance with the institutions the Talmud treats and with the spirit characterizing its many intricate discussions. His production of a commentary on a part of the Midrash and his composition of some of the prayers and reflections, still having a place in the ritual of the Orthodox Synagogue, may not be relevant in a treatment of Rashi, as Bible exegete; nevertheless reference to these undertakings must needs be made, in order to indicate the gigantic proportions of the literature he left to posterity.

As Bible exegete, his influence extended not simply beyond the borders of his own school, but beyond the confines of France into Germany, Spain and Italy, and in the course of a very short space of time, all over the entire world. Nor were his interpretations of moment only in his day. Even at the present time, as much as in the days immediately succeeding his life, his interpretations are studied by all students of the Bible, in their desire to understand the spirit of the various books of Scriptures.

But because his interpretation elicited almost world-wide attention and often evoked the most favorable comments at the hands of his contemporaries, it must not be imagined, that he encountered no opposition. In Ibn Ezra, to whose activity we shall refer in a subsequent chapter, he found a critic worthy of his steel. In a number of instances, Ibn Ezra criticises Rashi's conclusions severely. This is but natural, in view of the fact that they started from altogether different premises and pursued widely varying methods.

Rashi's commentary on the Bible, written in Rabbinical Hebrew, must be studied in the light of the exegetical tendencies prevailing in his day, if it is to be thoroughly understood. Simultaneous with the flowering of Bible exegesis in Spain, there arose a school of exegesis in Northern Africa, whose purpose was to establish the "Peshat," the simple, the natural explanation of Scriptures, in opposition to the "Derash," the traditional, the derived, sense. On many sides, it was felt that neither the "Peshat" nor the "Derash" alone, can unravel the meaning of Biblical passages. The happy combination of both, consisting of the virtues of these methods, was, for the proper understanding of

Scriptures, deemed essential by a number of men who observed with closest attention, the rivalry existing between the exponents of these several tendencies. Rashi was one of the champions of the theory, which sought to bring about a compromise between the "Peshat" and the "Derash." He interspersed the Aggadic and Midrashic with the philological, a circumstance, which, in all likelihood, accounted for the popularity of his commentary. One can readily detect Rashi's indebtedness to the Targumim, the Talmud and the Masora. Toward these he leaned not only to a great extent, but mayhap too much. Trained as he was in Talmudic schools, he could not easily emancipate himself from the Aggadic interpretation as he should have done, in order to make his work stand more successfully the scientific test. One fact must be emphasized with reference to him, and this is, that he aims at that clearness and conciseness, worthy of emulation by the men in his sphere of life. He is never daunted by the obscurity of an expression or passage. Whenever he realizes that the reader may not comprehend the meaning of a phrase with the aid of the explanation given by him, he not infrequently gives French equivalents for the Hebrew terms. It may be stated in this connection that the French vocabulary employed by him is of great assistance in determining the phonology of the old French spoken in his day. Popular as Rashi's commentary was, it naturally evoked praise, not only at the hands of Jews, but also at the hands of non-Jews, many of whom have based numerous interpretations given by them, upon explanations found in the Rashi commentary, although Rashi does not always evidence the scientific method. Suffice it to say, that

he, like others, contributed his valuable quota to Biblical exegesis. Among non-Jews, who were affected by Rashi's method, were Luther and Nicolas de Lyra.

In order to be able to get a clear conception of Rashi's method, a few illustrations and interpretations given by him, will prove of great assistance.

In interpreting the first verse of Genesis, he remarks: "Rabbi Isaac says, 'The Torah should not have commenced with this passage, but with Exodus 12:2, reading, "This month shall be to you the beginning of months; because it is the first commandment given to Israel." Why, therefore, does the Torah begin with the creation story?' The answer to this question is given in Psalm 111:6, reading, 'The power of his works, has God told unto his people, that he might give them the heritage of nations.' With this as a foundation, the Israelites could answer, if heathens should accuse them of taking their countries by force, that the whole earth belongs to God; that He is its Creator; that He has the right to give it to or take it away from such people as he desires." Continuing, Rashi says, "that the world was created because of the Law and because of Israel, but if you desire the simple explanation of this expression, then the text must be translated, that at the creation of heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void."

The eighth verse of Genesis I reads: "And God called the expanse heaven." Rashi here endeavors to explain the word "heaven"—"Shamayim." He says that it may consist of the following: either the words "Sa" and "Mayim," meaning "carrying water"; the words "Sham and Mayim," "there is water"; or the words "Esh" and "Mayim," "fire and water."

Referring to Genesis 49:22, which reads, "Joseph is a fruitful bough by a spring, the branches of which run over the wall," Rashi remarks, on the basis that the word for "branches," "Banoth," originally signified "daughters," that many interpretations may be given for this passage, but that it may mean that the daughters of Egypt ascended a wall to behold the beauty of Joseph, since "Shur," the word for "wall," may be taken as the verb connoting "to look."

Exodus 1:5 reads, "A new king arose over Egypt," which is explained by Rashi on the authority of one teacher, that the Pharaoh was really a new king and on the authority of another, that only new regulations were formulated with regard to the Jews and that the king merely acted as though he did not know Joseph.

Verse 10 of the same chapter reads, "Come, let us deal wisely," and is an expression always signifying premeditated preparation to carry out an express purpose.

Chapter 21:1 of Exodus reads, "And these are the ordinances," and is explained as follows: "In every place where the word 'these' is found standing by itself, the matter which follows is distinct from that which preceded; but wherever the expression 'and these' occurs, that which follows, only supplements that which precedes.

Interpreting the first verse of Psalm 2, reading, "Wherefore do nations rage and people imagine a vain thing," Rashi remarks that our Rabbis believe this Psalm to refer to King David, of whom it is said when the Philistines heard that Israel had anointed David to be king over them, the Philistines gathered together their forces and fell by his hand.



Interpreting Psalm 120, Rashi explains that the superscription of each of the songs of the collection, of which Psalm 120 is the first, is worded "Song of Degrees," because the Levites were in the habit of singing one of these songs on each of the fifteen steps leading from "the Court of Israel" "to the court of the women" in the Temple.

It is needless to cite additional examples to illustrate the character of the interpretations, which Rashi was in the habit of giving. The few which have been furnished indicate how, in his work, the plain and the derived sense are mingled together in view of their equal importance in his eyes.

Rashi's effort to harmonize the simple with the derived sense, did not cease to have champions, with his death, in the year 1105. For several centuries after his demise, a class of men followed in his wake, who added interpolations to his commentary. These men are known by the name of "Tossafists"—"glossators." The characteristic of this school was its complete emancipation from authority, in consequence of which it took the liberty of correcting and even changing the conclusions of its much revered pioneer. Members of Rashi's own family continued and amended the work Rashi began. Among the Tossafists—the glossators, the man who comes first to our notice is Joseph ben Simon Kara. He stated that the words of Scriptures are in every instance intelligible and require no additional explanations; that the Midrash purposes only to cultivate or encourage research in the Scriptures; that the reader who does not know the natural sense of Scriptures and inclines toward the Midrash, may be likened to one who is dragged along

by a raging stream and is therefore ready to grasp every straw in order to rescue himself from destruction; and that he who turns honestly to the word of God, will be sure to recognize its true significance and unity.

While Joseph ben Simon Kara plays a prominent part as Tossafist, greater luminary by far is Rashi's grandson, Samuel ben Meir. He was a native of Ramerupt, a town located near Troyes. He was born in 1085 and died about 1174. He is known by the name of "Rashbam," an abbreviation, consisting of the initials of his title and name. He was a pupil of his grandfather and followed the Aggadic interpretation for a time, but eventually emancipated himself from it to a great extent. Rashbam's knowledge of Hebrew Grammar was thorough, as was also his acquaintance with Spanish Hebrew literature. He was recognized as an authority not only by Jews, but also by Christians. To the latter, he at times explained difficult Biblical passages. His principal work was his commentary on the Pentateuch. That which gave to it individuality was its independence from the received interpretations found in the Talmud and Midrash and its return to the "Peshat." In his commentary to Genesis, he states that the interpretation of a Biblical verse must not transcend the natural sense, even though the Torah, by allusions, may attempt to teach the principles of the Haggadah and Halacha. He declares that he himself hañ frequently disputed with Rashi and that Rashi confessed to him that if he had had the time, he, Rashi, would probably have revised his commentary in order to make it accord more thoroughly with the natural sense. In a word, Rashbam tried to harmonize his exegesis with the exegesis of his

time and permitted the traditional interpretation to obtain only, provided it was not in conflict with the natural sense. He did not hesitate to attack Ibn Ezra any more than Ibn Ezra feared to criticise Rashi. Some of his interpretations, which are of interest, are the following: He held that the creation story was put at the beginning of the Torah in order to accentuate and explain the Fourth Commandment, which enjoins the keeping of the Sabbath; that Moses told the Israelites the creation story in order to make them feel that the world was not always as luxuriant with life as in later days, but that in earlier times it was indeed empty and void. Rashbam explained the names of God in Exodus 2:14, as verbal forms, indicative of God's eternal existence.

With reference to Ecclesiastes, he states that the words "vanity of vanities" are not a part of the original text, but, in all probability, the superscription of an editor. In his interpretation, he shows a marked acquaintance with French philology and with the Latin language, and he was also no tyro in geography, as evidenced by his comments on Genesis 25:31, reading, "And Israel journeyed and spread his tents beyond the tower of flocks"; on Numbers 21:28, reading, "A fire has gone out of Cheshbon and a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar-Moab, the men of the high places of the Arnon;" and on Deuteronomy 2:3, which reads, "Ye have travelled long enough around the mountain, turn yourselves northward." Rashbam also wrote commentaries on the Talmud, but in this province, he did not reach the height of his grandfather's erudition.

A younger brother of Samuel, Jacob ben Meir, known

as "Rabbenu Tam" was also a Tossafist of marked scholarship and pronounced mental analysis. He was born in 1100 and died 1171. While an exegete of the Bible, he did not come up to his brother Samuel in this particular, but far surpassed him in Talmudic interpretation. Grammatical studies engaged his attention to such an extent that he entered the breach between Menahem ben Saruk and Dunash with a work called, "Hakh-raoth" (decisions) in which he protected Menahem against the onslaughts of his critic.

While the Tossafists in France were numerous, but one more remains to be mentioned because of his celebrity, namely, Joseph Bechor Shor, who followed in the spirit of Rashbam in the creation of his Biblical commentary. It is only recently that the works of this man have been brought to light.

Whereas the Biblical interpretations of Rashi and of the school of Tossafists became known throughout the then existing Jewry, on account of the power of dissemination, which characterizes all thought, the persecutions to which French Jews were unfortunately subjected certainly helped very materially in giving this new school its prestige. As Jews were driven out of France and their scholars felt obliged to settle in other communities, new centers for the spread of the teachings of the Tossafists were called into life.

With this digression from the Spanish Jews, we return to them once more to take up the work they did in the field of Biblical exegesis, as based upon the valuable researches, made by those forerunners, the grammarians and lexicographers living at the time of Moorish sway.



# IBN EZRA AND THE KIMCHIS



## CHAPTER V

### IBN EZRA AND THE KIMCHIS.

If there was ever time, since the days in which the Psalms were written, that the muses bestowed special favor upon the Jewish people, it was in the age marking the Spanish civilization with Moorish culture. Poetry became the pleasant and fascinating occupation of all men in Israel, who were prompted to explain Israel's place among the nations, its literary productions, and its religious ideals. Even those, who evidenced striking mental analysis, and in whom the imagination was not usually known to transcend its natural bounds, were occasionally given to the making of verse, as a happy pastime. While much of the poetry of the Spanish Jews was secular in character, the bulk of it, as may be readily supposed, ~~from~~ the distinctive genius of the Jew, his longings, and his ideals, was decidedly religious. The ritual in use in the modern Synagogue can trace a great portion of its component material to these times when Judah took up, once more, its long silent harps, and at-tuned them to inspiring lays. It appeared, indeed, as if history were to repeat itself, and the golden age of sacred literature, which lay between the end of the Babylonian Exile and the period of the Maccabees, were to dawn once more.

And yet, general as the writing of verse was among the Spanish Jews, they at no time ceased developing the science of Biblical criticism on the basis of those gram-



matical and lexicographical researches carried on by the scholars of the Tenth Century. In fact, Spanish Jews were jealous of the place, which they had won for themselves as interpreters of the Scriptures among the Jewry of that day.

Although every now and then the activities of a scholar in another country more than justified the inference that Spain would be compelled to cede the honor of being the leader in Jewish Biblical criticism, Spanish Jews were ever ready to assert, by some new commentary, the claim they continued to have to the position they had won for themselves through years of faithful application and hard work.

The man who, in the Twelfth Century, made good the leadership of Spanish Jews in the realm of Jewish science, was Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra. He towers head and shoulders above the great celebrities of his time in that pursuit to which he consecrated his God-given talents.

The Ibn Ezra family was one of the best known and most popular families in Spain. A number of its members had ascended to the enviable rungs of fame. To say that one was an Ibn Ezra was equivalent, in those days, to a certification of broadness, intellectuality and extensive scholarship. In the province of poetry more especially, the Ibn Ezras had rendered great service. All of them were gifted with a poetic genius. They all seemed to be favored by the muses, and could attune their lyres to lofty themes. Whether Abraham Ibn Ezra belonged to this celebrated family cannot be stated with certainty. It is held that he undoubtedly was a member of one of the family's more distant branches.

Abraham Ibn Ezra was born in Toledo, 1092, and died in Calahorra on the border of Navarre in Aragon, in 1167. But little is known of his early life. As soon as he knew how to value the education which comes from broad cultural surroundings, he migrated to Cordova, the rendezvous of Jewish thinkers and scholars. He is reported to have been married to an only daughter of Jehudah Halevi, the most celebrated Jewish singer and one of the leading philosophers of those times. The marriage is said to have been brought about in this wise. Jehudah Halevi was eking out a precarious existence by virtue of his devotion to scholarship. His poverty militated against his daughter's chances of marriage. Because of this fact, Jehudah's wife reprimanded him. He therefore made a vow, that he would give his daughter to the first man who would chance to enter his home on the following day. The first person to pass over the threshold of Jehudah's home on the morrow, was Ibn Ezra, no better, but probably worse conditioned than Jehudah Halevi's family. It was thus that Ibn Ezra won a life's companion, who shared with him more of sorrows than she did of joys, and he thus became related to one of the greatest celebrities of the Spanish Jews.

Ibn Ezra never, in his entire life, enjoyed those blessings calculated to insure his comfort and ease. In him the lot of most literary men met with stern and almost unbearable realization. He failed in everything but scholarly efforts. In his epigrammatic style, he commented upon his never disappearing misfortune and his ever continuing inability to amass wealth, by saying, "If I were to engage in shroud making, men would cease

dying; or if I made candles, the sun would never set until the hour of my death." Though apparently doomed to lead a poverty-stricken life, he did not desist from trying to improve his condition. It is perhaps due to his desire to better his lot that he spent almost all his years in travel, endeavoring, in all probability, to find some place where fortune would deal more kindly with him and his.

In his wanderings he visited Asia and Africa, and in Europe went to Rome, Lucca, Mantua, and later to Narbonne, Beziers, Rhodes and London. He won friends at every one of these places, for his personality was most interesting. Apart from the fact that he was a fascinating conversationalist, on account of his extensive travel, intelligence and epigrams, display of wit, and use of thrusting satire (all characteristics to be encountered also in his works) he possessed so extensive a versatility of knowledge, that he was able to adapt himself to all persons and conditions, with which fortune brought him in contact. Ibn Ezra was poet, philosopher and mathematician, in addition to being a master in the field of Biblical exegesis. It was, therefore, but natural, that he could never have been at a loss for conversational material, with which to make himself agreeable to his acquaintances. In fact, it may be said of him that he was a product of the culture of his age. He was a creature of circumstances who would have been obliged to become what he was even in spite of himself. All the men these times produced were many-sided. No one could live for any length of time within the borders of Spain, without becoming moulded, to a great extent, by the numerous factors which entered into the civilization

of the Moors. Specialists, whose knowledge is restricted to one specific province of thought, to the exclusion of information in all other branches of learning, have no place in the economy of the Spanish people. The Spanish specialist was always particularly strong in his own field, but, in addition, he mastered sufficient of other branches of learning to make his opinion on almost every other discipline of consequence.

Grammarian as every Biblical exegete had to be, in order to be able to interpret the sense of Scriptures, Ibn Ezra must needs claim our attention first and foremost, as a contributor to grammatical research. He not only translated Ben Chayyug's grammatical works, but he himself also wrote a work entitled "Measnayim"—"The Scale"—treating of vowels, verbal forms, stems, conjugations, and the exposition of Hebrew grammatical terminology. In the introduction to his work he speaks of the sixteen Hebrew grammarians, beginning with Saadia, and ending with Levi ibn Tibbon. Another grammatical work of his is "Zachoth," dealing with the purity of the Hebrew language; and the third is his "Yessod Hadiqduq" discussing the whole province of the Hebrew language. Other works of minor importance along this line, are the "Sapha Berura"—the pure speech—and the "Sefer Hamispar" treating of numerals.

In his Bible exegesis, he was thoroughly original, bringing the light of his many-sided knowledge to bear upon the interpretation of Biblical passages. The purpose of his exegesis is understood best from the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch. He there speaks of four existing methods, employed in the inter-

pretation of Scriptures, each one of which he criticises in turn. The first is that of the Gaonim, who, in his opinion, employed too much foreign matter in their explanation. The second is the method of the Karaites, whose ignoring of tradition he condemns. The third is that of the Allegorists, of which he disapproves, because it makes claims for the concealed meaning of Scriptures, in the face of its oft-evident significance. And the fourth is that of the Derash, against which he warns readers, because it prefers the derived, or Aggadic sense to the natural meaning. In opposition to these methods, Ibn Ezra may be regarded the exponent of the Peshat, the natural sense. As such he differs from Rashi, to a great extent, as Rashi, in addition to advocating the Peshat, the natural sense, frequently adopts the Derash, the derived sense, in view of Rashi's belief that a Scriptural verse may have more than one meaning. Never did critic interpret Scriptures, who made a stronger plea for, and emphasized, more forcibly, the integrity of the text. The Masora was to him an infallible guide. Its conclusions were by him considered thoroughly authoritative. Ibn Ezra pleads with a conviction, the strength of which is greatly increased by his peculiar style. He is terse and concise. He indulges in no superfluous language. He employs biting sarcasm, and frequently indulges in witticism. When he criticises an opponent, he is unmerciful in the analysis of the opponent's thought. In fact, there is nothing that he enjoyed more than to test the conclusions arrived at by other critics. Although an advocate of the Peshat, and being seriously opposed to the four existing methods of interpretation on grounds already specified, Ibn Ezra must not be con-

sidered as being thoroughly consistent. At times he defended the very methods against which he warns Biblical students. Upon a superficial examination, he appears not to know his own mind. Nor can his works lay claim to symmetry and completeness. He frequently leaps from theme to theme, a phenomenon to be explained, no doubt, by the nervous and restless life he was obliged to lead, in consequence of his almost uninterrupted migration from country to country. The conservatism of his criticism may be recognized by his unwillingness to concede that euphemistic changes were made in the Biblical text. Whatever Ibn Ezra does not understand, he considers one of the secrets beyond the comprehension of men. To elucidate these, he considers useless effort. In this connection it may not be amiss to state that he was an astrologist, and firmly believed that the stars, to a great extent, determine the destiny of man. It was on this score that he reconciled himself completely to that extreme poverty from which he found it impossible to extricate himself during his entire life.

His exegetical works are a commentary on the Pentateuch, (usually printed on the outer margin of the text in the large Hebrew editions of the Bible), on Isaiah, the twelve Minor Prophets, Psalms, Job, the five Scrolls, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. There are two recensions of his commentary on Daniel; two also of his commentary on the Song of Songs and Esther, and also two on Proverbs. Works of his which incidentally contain exegetical matter are his "Yesod Mora," explaining the reason for Biblical commandments, the "Iggereth Shabbath," treating of the Sabbath and "Sefer Hashem," discussing the name of God.

On account of the lack of consistency displayed by Ibn Ezra in his commentaries, a number of super-commentaries came into existence, the purpose of which was to make his explanations more intelligible to the reader. The authors of these super-commentaries lived in the Fourteenth Century, and some of them as late as the Nineteenth. In order to get an idea of some of his conclusions, let us take the following instances.

As to angels, he says, that the angel between God and man is the human intellect. With regard to the story of the Garden of Eden, he rejects all allegorical interpretation, and adheres to the words of Scriptures, adding, of course, that it contains a concealed meaning. Such is his attitude also toward the accounts of the Tower of Babel, of the Prophet Bileam, of the visit made by the angels to Abraham, and of other similar events in Biblical history. Ibn Ezra questioned the claim that the whole of the Pentateuch could have been written by Moses. Thus, for example, he states that Genesis 36: 31 and following, the fragment treating of the kings who reigned over Edom before kings ruled over Israel, could not be of Mosaic authorship. Deut. chapter 34, he ascribes to Joshua. Ibn Ezra was also the first to question the unity of the Book of Isaiah. He believed that the last part of the book, bearing the name of that prophet, was the product of a seer living in the years of the Babylonian captivity. He recognized the existence of glosses in the Scriptures, as for example, such expressions, "And the Canaanite was then in the land"; (Gen. 12: 6); "On the mount of the Lord it shall be seen"; (Gen. 22: 14); "These are the words which Moses spoke unto all Israel, on this side of the Jordan," (Deut. 1: 1); "Behold, his bed was a bed of iron," (Deut. 3: 11.)

His introduction to the Book of Psalms is of great interest, and a part of it is given here, in order to convey an idea of Ibn Ezra's theories. Says Ibn Ezra: "In this Book of Psalms are compositions, at the head of which are given the names of the composers. In the case of a number, as for example, Psalms 1, 91, etc., such names are missing. The critics differ with regard to this Book of Psalms. Some claim that the whole of it was written by David. If we read at the top of a Psalm, both 'Jeduthun' and 'David,' it is to be inferred that the Psalm is the composition of David, and was handed to Jeduthun, a director, for musical rendering. Psalm 72 is a prophecy of David, with regard to his son Solomon, and Psalm 90, the Prayer of Moses, was composed by David and delivered by him to Moses' descendants. The same theory holds good with regard to Psalms in the superscription of which we find the names "Assaf," 'The Sons of Korah,' etc. Other critics claim that this book contains no predictions of the future, and that it was, therefore, put by the ancients, together with Job and the Scrolls. Proofs of this are the terms 'Song' and 'Prayer.' They held that Psalm 137 was written by a poet living in Babylonia, and that the same is the case with the Psalms headed 'The Sons of Korah.' Psalm 119 is Babylonian.

Ibn Ezra also holds that every Psalm, at the head of which we find the name "David" is composed either by David or by some poet who dedicated his composition to David. He claims that the Prayer of Moses was written by Moses, Psalms of Assaf by Assaf, and the Psalms of the Sons of Korah, by the Sons of Korah. The Psalm without any name in the superscription, he



claims, may be by other singers than David, although some are by David. He believes the Book of Canticles to be an allegorical representation of the history of Israel from the days of the Patriarch Abraham, to the Messianic times, and that it emphasizes naught but the love of God for Israel. Daniel's vision is explained as follows, in his commentary to Deut. 7:4-8. "The first animal resembling a lion is Nebuchadnezzar, and the eagle's wings torn out of him are his descendants Ewil Merodach and Belshazzar. The second animal is the Persian Kingdom, which destroyed the Chaldean. The third animal is the Greek Kingdom, which began with the reign of Alexander the Great, and extended through the Roman rule. Its four wings are the four kings among whom the Kingdom of Alexander was divided after his death. The fourth animal is the Kingdom of the Arabs. Its ten horns are the ten districts where Arabs resided. The little horn lies in the distant future and will make its appearance before the advent of the Messiah."

From this presentation of Ibn Ezra's thought, we turn once more to France, where, in the City of Narbonne, the French center of Jewish activity, an illustrious family attained to prominence for its grammatical and exegetical researches. The family is known by the name "Kimchi," the head of that family being Joseph ben Isaac Kimchi, surnamed "Rikam," (a word consisting of the initials of his fuller name), who hailed from the south of France. He was greatly influenced by the thought of Ibn Ezra, who, in his travels, visited at the Kimchi home. Like Ibn Ezra, he uses the word "Shamar"—to keep—as the paradigm of the Hebrew verb. Ibn

Ezra, in turn, quotes him also in his commentaries. While Joseph ben Isaac Kimchi was no doubt the means of transplanting Jewish Arabic philosophy into Christian Europe, he did not contribute anything new or especially valuable to Biblical exegesis, although he wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and some of the sacred writings. He indulged, however, in the writing of verses, the translation of Bachya Ibn Pakuda's "Duties of the Heart" from Arabic into Hebrew, and turned Gabirol's "Mibchar Ha-Peninim"—into metrical form.

The winning of spurs on the part of the Kimchi family, in the field of Biblical exegesis, was left to the youngest son of Joseph ben Isaac, known by the name of David, and surnamed "Redak," also an abbreviation of his fuller name. He was born in Narbonne in 1160, and died in 1235. Because his father had passed away while David was a mere child, his rearing was left to Moses, an elder brother. His main work consisted of an investigation into the Hebrew language, known as "Michlol," comprising two parts, the first of which treats of the grammar of the Hebrew language, while the second part, called "Book of Roots" is a vocabulary. Another work of his is known as "Et Sofer," literally, "The Pen of the Scribe," which discusses the Masora and the Hebrew accents. The commentaries, which Redak left to posterity are on the earlier and later Prophets, the Psalms, the Book of Chronicles, and only on a part of Genesis. In the Proverbs and Psalms, he attacks the Messianic interpretations given by the Church to certain verses. His style is marked by clearness, completeness, and conciseness. In his interpretation and

definition, he built on the discoveries of his predecessors, and thus helped to give wider circulation to the conclusions of the earlier grammarians and exegetes, as much as he did to the grammatical system of his father, Joseph ben Isaac. To indicate the esteem in which Redak was held, we need but refer to the application made to him of the verse in the Chapters of the Fathers, reading, "Where there is no Kemach (literally meaning meal, or flour) there is no knowledge of the law" which was twisted in spelling so as to admit of the rendering, "Where there is no Kimchi, there is no law." Redak is the Ibn Ezra of France, in that he believed that the sense of Scriptures must be based upon an examination of grammatical forms and the emphasis of the natural sense.

The consideration of the following passage found in his commentary of the Prophets, conveys a clear conception of his method. He remarks, "I desire to interpret verses of Scriptures according to their needs, and shall explain words where explanation is necessary. I shall interpret the text with reference to the Qere and the Kethibh, so far as I am able. It appears that these differences in the reading and the writing of the text came into existence in this wise: The books were lost during the Exile, the experts died, and the men of the Great Synagogue, who endeavored to restore the Torah to its former dignity, discovering differences in the reading, always decided on the basis of the majority of existing testimonies. Where these men of the Great Synagogue were in doubt, they wrote the word into the text, but did not point it, placing the proper pointing into the margin; or wrote only into the margin but not

into the text; or, again, wrote one reading into the text and the variant into the margin."

The two men Ibn Ezra and Kimchi, working along similar lines and according to similar methods, were not only the links that bound together the Moorish and Christian civilizations during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, but they also contributed, each in his own country, to the promotion of that science, which the Jew considered of prime importance, in the proper understanding of that work or that literature, on which the faiths of Christian Europe were founded. The products of their pen, like the commentary of Rashi upon the Bible, and probably more than the commentary of Rashi, are the sources from which the scholars of all ages succeeding theirs, drew the inspiration which gave their conclusions the stamp of truth.





# MAIMONIDES AND NACHMANIDES





## CHAPTER VI

### MAIMONIDES AND NACHMANIDES

Self-defense and adjustment have been the alternating and oft coincidental tasks of religion, ever since religion first attempted to explain the mystery of the universe and life. Skeptics and doubters, who questioned the value of its services in the construction of civilization, had to be answered, not because their charges were true, but because of the fear that many persons, easily deluded, might have their faith in religion shaken. The discovery of new truths on the part of constantly thinking humanity, had to be reckoned with, not because there was a real conflict between science and religion, but because religion felt that it had to keep pace with the evolution of knowledge. Had such not been the conduct of religion in the many periods of the world's history, religion would not be vocal with inspiring messages to society, in these days of ours, when every factor of civilization is tested by the law of evolution.

Among the faiths which have come into and gone out of existence, none has been compelled to defend and readjust itself as frequently as did the faith of Israel. "Tribe of the wandering foot," as Israel has been, it came in contact with the earlier forms of culture which the Orient sponsored, and with the later phases of speculation expounded by Occidental peoples. Thus it happens that from the moment Israel became dispersed, it



turned religious philosopher, at one time asserting the superiority of its theory of life, at another demonstrating the harmony between it and other systems of thought, and frequently availing itself of the light furnished by philosophies of a newer day.

During the sojourn of the Jew in Spain, radiant with a Moorish cultural complexion, the Jew felt called upon to devote himself to the task of subjecting his belief to careful analysis. Whereas his imagination indulged in poetic flights, his reason delved into profoundest thought. He could not escape the latter. Two schools of philosophy attracted marked attention, and won for themselves numerous eager students, and indefatigable expounders. The philosophy of Aristotle had met with revival, and the thought of the Motekallemin, an Arabic sect, was being proclaimed. Spain and all its people, irrespective of their religious traditions, promised to be Grecized on the one hand, by the theory of the eternity of the Universe and Mohammedanized on the other by the theory of God's existence; incorporate and unity, together with the "Creatio ex Nihilo" doctrine. The Jew could not and would not ignore these two systems. He felt called upon to search them carefully, contrast their teachings with his, and explain whether or not his religion, originally built on Scriptural doctrine, was, or was not found wanting, when weighed in the then applied philosophical balance.

No man of average attainments could undertake this examination. A man fitted for the work by natural endowments and acquired erudition, the Spanish Jews possessed in Moses Maimonides. If he had not been a master in the written and oral laws, in Biblical and

Rabbinical disciplines, he could never have proved himself equal to the emergency. Profound philosopher that he was, it is not particularly as such that he is of interest at present, but rather as Biblical exegete, who, in the writings he has left to posterity, has handed down many valuable philosophical conclusions, illuminating the sense of Scriptures. Maimonides' fuller name was Moses ben Maimon. In Arabic literature he is known as "Abu Imran Musa ben Maimun Ibn Abd Allah." Among Jews he is called "Rambam," a term consisting of the initials of his name, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon.

He saw the light of day first at Cordova, in 1135, and died at Cairo, Egypt, 1204. The years, lying between his birth and death, were characterized by a career which has many a touch of the romantic. The foundation of his scholarship was laid by his father who was himself a man of profound erudition, and by some of the most celebrated Arabic lights of his country and time. When he was thirteen years of age, Cordova was conquered by the Almohades, who gave the Jews the choice between the embrace of Islam and exile. The Maimon family wandered about from place to place for many years, until in 1160, they took up their residence in Fez, hoping not to have their religion discovered. However, owing to his ever-increasing prominence, and the consequent discovery of his faith, Maimonides would have been executed, if it had not been for the intervention of a celebrated Mohammedan literary friend. This experience led him to realize that he had to seek shelter elsewhere, settling finally in Fostat (Cairo). Losing his father, and subsequently his brother David, Maimonides, who had during his entire life devoted himself to

the study and exposition of the law, now began to earn his own livelihood by the practice of medicine. He was so successful a physician that the attention of Saladin's Vizier was directed to him, who, in turn recommended him to the royal family, with the result that he became physician to the Court, a position which, according to Arabic accounts, was also offered to him in the court of Richard the First. The strenuosity of his life, which his dual position as physician to the Court, and as religious head of the Cairo community entailed, is stated by him in a letter written in 1199 to his friend and the translator of his works, Rabbi Samuel Ibn Tibbon. Says Maimonides in his letter:

"With respect to your wish to come here to me, I cannot but say how greatly your visit would delight me; for I truly long to communicate with you, and would anticipate our meeting with even greater joy than you. Yet I must advise you not to expose yourself to the perils of the voyage, for beyond seeing me and my doing all I could to honor you, you would not derive any advantage from your visit. Do not expect to be able to confer with me on any scientific subject for even one hour, either by day or night; for the following is my daily occupation: I dwell in Mizr (Fostat) and the Sultan resides at Kahira (Cairo). These two places are two Sabbath days' journeys (about one mile and a half distant from each other). My duties to the Sultan are very heavy. I am obliged to visit him every day, early in the morning, and when he or any of his children, or any of the inmates of his harem are indisposed, I dare not quit Kahira, but must stay during the greater part of the day in the palace. It also frequently happens

that one or two of the officers fall sick, and I must attend to their healing; hence, as a rule, I repair to Kahira very early in the day, and even if nothing unusual happens, I do not return to Mizr until the afternoon. Then I am almost dying with hunger. I find the ante-chambers filled with people, both Jews and Gentiles, nobles and common people, judges and bailiffs, friends and foes (a mixed multitude) who await the time of my return. I dismount from my animal, wash my hands, go forth to my patients, and entreat them to bear with me while I partake of some slight refreshment, the only meal I take in the twenty-four hours. Then I go forth to attend to my patients, write prescriptions and directions for their several ailments. Patients go in and out until nightfall, and sometimes even, I solemnly assure you, until two hours and more in the night. I converse with them and prescribe for them, while lying down from sheer fatigue; and when night falls, I am so exhausted that I can scarcely speak. In consequence of this, no Israelite can have any private interview with me, except on the Sabbath. On that day the whole congregation, or at least a majority of the members come to me after the morning service, when I instruct them as to their proceedings during the whole week, we study together a little until noon, when they depart. Some of them return and read with me after the afternoon service, until evening prayers. In this manner I spend that day. I have related to you only a part of what you would see if you were to visit me."

The most important works which have come down to us from this great teacher of the Middle Ages—in fact such is the case with all his literary productions—seem

to have been produced in their succession, in consequence of the thought changes which were then taking place in Medieval Europe. Attracted as he was by the philosophical disciplines of his time, he did not state the attitude of the Jew towards them, without first analyzing and summarizing carefully for himself and his contemporaries, the fundamental concepts and the accumulated traditions of Israel. Thus it happens that at the early age of twenty-three, he began a commentary on the Mishnah, known by the Arabic name "Sirag" literally "illumination." His object was to simplify for the beginner, the study of the Talmud. He takes up every Mishnah separately, furnishes an explanation for it, and gives the result of the discussion carried on by the Gemarah, with the Mishnah as a basis. It was written in Arabic in order to make it accessible to Arabic speaking people, although later in life he regretted the fact that he had not written it in Hebrew. For its Hebrew rendition, Charisi, Joseph Ben Isaac Ibn Alfual, and Jacob Abbassi were responsible, each contributing a part.

A second work of Maimonides, theological, ethical and liturgical in character, is his "Yad Chazaqah" literally "the strong hand" written in Hebrew. As indicated by the numerical value of the term, "Yad," it consists of fourteen parts, and presents in systematic form, according to subject matter, Talmudical teachings and laws. This work, in fact, is a code treating the institutions of Judaism on the basis of Biblical, Talmudical, and post-Talmudical literature. In the first part we have the concepts about God, the teachings with regard to the study of the law, and injunctions concerning idolatry;

in the second the love due to God; in the third, laws with regard to Sabbaths and holidays; in the fourth, laws concerning marriage; in the fifth, forbidden marriages and food; in the sixth, vows and oaths; in the seventh, regulations concerning agriculture; in the eighth, the divine service; in the ninth, offerings; in the tenth, rules of cleanliness; in the eleventh, the criminal law; in the twelfth, laws of purchase and sale; in the thirteenth, the civil law; and in the fourteenth, regulations governing courts, judges and kings.

The principal work of Maimonides was his "More Nebuchim"—"The Guide of the Perplexed." It was written in Arabic, and is known by the name "Dalalat Al-Hairin." Its first translation into Hebrew was made by Samuel Ibn Tibbon, and almost simultaneously with him, Jehudah Al Charizi also produced a Hebrew rendition of the original. In "The Guide of the Perplexed," Maimonides defines the attitude of Judaism towards the prevailing philosophies of the times, and establishes harmony between the Bible and Aristoteleanism. Its object is stated best by himself in his introduction, when he says:

"I have written this work neither for the common people nor for beginners, nor for those who occupy themselves only with the law as it is handed down, without concerning themselves with its principles. The design of this work is rather to promote the understanding of the real spirit of the law, to guide those religious persons, who, adhering to the Torah, have studied philosophy and are embarrassed by the contradiction between the teachings of philosophy, and the literal sense of the Torah."

It is divided into three parts. The first part treats of the attributes of the Deity, which are preceded by the consideration of homonyms and synonyms. The point here made by him is, that terms used with reference to God, which are applicable to man, are used only anthropomorphistically. The first part closes with an analysis of the principles of the Motekallemin. The second part treats of the essence of the "First Cause" and the theory of Aristotle as agreeing in many points with the teachings of Scriptures, of angels, the planets, creation, prophecy, and prophetic visions. The third part treats of the visions of Ezekiel, of the various kinds of evil, trials, temptations, and the reasons for the giving of the Biblical precepts. It is in this work that Maimonides formulated for the first time in the history of Jews, articles of creed, which are, in his case, thirteen in number, as reflected in the "Yigdal" one of the hymns still in existence in the ritual of the Synagogue.

In addition to the works already mentioned, there are a number of minor literary productions. They are the "Sefer Hamizvoth"—"The Book of the Commandments"; the "Iggereth Hashemad"; a treatise on apostasy from Judaism, and on martyrdom; and the "Iggereth Teman," a treatise on the Messianic hope.

As in the case of many other Jewish writers, who have rendered valuable service to Biblical exegesis, the opinions of Moses Maimonides on the intent of Scriptures are not to be found in any one book or work, devoted to Biblical interpretation as such, but are scattered through his writings, and are not any the less valuable on this account.

As epoch-making as Maimonides was in the realm of

religious philosophy, so epoch-making he was, also in the province of Biblical exegesis. This fact must needs be self-evident, in view of his employment of philosophy in the interpretation of the Scriptures. If there is one word which characterizes his exegesis, it is the term, "rationalistic." His attitude towards tradition was very much the same as that of Ibn Ezra, in that he took account only of the contents of the traditional interpretation, but did not look upon it as a final authority. The Aggada received his attention only as a stage in the gradual development, making for the thorough understanding of the Bible. With him, Bible and science were not in conflict with one another. Nor did he concern himself merely with the literary study of Scriptures. In his estimation, Hebrew grammar and rhetoric constituted the stones, and philosophy the mortar which had to be used in the construction of an enduring exegesis. Whatever some of his critics may say to the contrary, it cannot be denied that the rigid system of Maimonides made clear, in numerous instances, the meaning of many a Scriptural passage and expression, which for others remained shrouded in obscurity. To show his rationalism let us call attention to the following:

The Pentateuch is, in his opinion, a book illuminating many mysteries. The prophetic writings are to him indicative of a marked genius possessed by their authors; and the Hagiographa testify to an intellectual superiority, with which their authors were gifted. With regard to Canticles he holds, that it consists of poetical allegories. Concerning Koheleth, he states, that it contains many non-religious elements. And of Job he asserts that it is a parable, the object of which is to portray the theories of man on the ways of Providence.



Since he re-echoes the Talmudical saying, "The Torah speaks in the language of man," it is but natural that he should father the doctrine, that when human organs, powers and feelings are ascribed to God by the Scriptures, such expressions must be understood metaphorically, and not literally. He is, in this particular, therefore, in very close sympathy with the interpretations of the Targumim. For the purpose of showing the metaphorical use of such Biblical expressions, he explains the difference of connotation between the synonyms "Toar," "Zelem," "Demuth" (form or likeness); also the difference between "Tabhnith" and "Temunah" (form, likeness), and between verbs such as "Raah," "Hibit" and "Chazah" (to see); between "Qarabh," "Naga" and "Nagash" (to touch, to approach); between "Bara," "Asah" and "Yazar" (to create, make, form); between "Ahabh" and "Chashaq" (to love).

The same end is subserved by his explanation of such homonyms as "Elohim" (God), "Adam" (man), "Ish" (man), "Panim" (face), "Achor" (back), "Regel" (foot), "Ayin" (eye), "Lebh" (heart), "Nefesh" (soul), "Ruach" (spirit), "Maqom" (place), etc.; and by the explanation of such verbs as "Alah" (to go up) and "Yarad," (to go down), "Halakh" (to go), "Ba" (to come), "Yaza" (to go out), "Yashabh" (to sit), "Qum" (to stand), etc., when applied to God. His interpretations of the various appellatives for the Deity are of interest. The name "Eheyeh" he derives from "Hayah" (to be). "Adonay" is derived from "Adon" meaning "Lord." "Elohim" is a term indicating an attribute of the

Deity, like "Rachum," etc. He believes in angels as spiritual beings, mediating between God and man. His presentation of prophecy is of moment. He holds that the prophetic faculty is natural to man, but that man may be prevented from prophesying, by Divine intervention. Prophets are, by him, said to differ in degree of prophetic power. The prophet receives his message through either a dream, vision or an angel. Moses is the prophet of prophets. He alone saw God face to face. On Genesis 1, he states that the creation story is not to be taken literally, and asserts that he discovers in it the teachings of Aristotelean physics and metaphysics, as he does in Ezekiel 1.

The sources Maimonides consulted were the grammarians Abulwalid and Chayyug, the translator Saadia, and the Biblical exegete Abraham Ibn Ezra. The Biblical exegetes of the Church were also not unknown to him, and are quoted repeatedly.

So highly esteemed was the service Maimonides rendered to the Jewish cause, that the saying came into vogue, "From Moses unto Moses there arose none like Moses"; which meant to convey the idea, that from Moses, the law-giver in Israel, to Moses Maimonides, the philosopher, none arose like either Moses.

Whereas there were many, in the days of Maimonides, who were willing to endorse this eulogistic estimate of Rambam, it cannot be said that he had naught but admirers. It must be remembered that his philosophy and exegesis were a new departure, and as such, were calculated to meet with opposition. The Biblical scholars of his time, and of the centuries immediately succeeding his, ranged themselves, therefore, into two

hostile camps. The Talmudists objected to his explanation of anthropomorphisms, employed in the Bible, Midrashim and Talmud, and to his high regard of philosophy. Among his opponents were Rabbi Abraham Ben David of Posquieres, known as "Rabhad," who attacked Maimonides' "Yad Chazakah" on the grounds, that he wrote in a Hebrew different from the Talmudic idiom; that he departed from the Talmudic arrangement of subjects; and that he failed to state the sources of some of his opinions. Maimonides defended himself against Rabhad's attack, by stating that the brevity and the dialect he employed in the presentation of his subject, would make the work more welcome to the student. Another opponent was Rabbi Meir Halevi Abulafia, head of the school in Toledo. A third was Rabbi Solomon Ben Abraham of Montpellier, and a fourth was Judah Ben Joseph Alfacher of Toledo. So intense was the opposition on the part of some scholars, against the theories of Maimonides, that the works of Maimonides were subsequently burned publicly, in the City of Paris, because regarded by strict Talmudists, as heretical literature. While the enemies of Maimonides were busy pointing out his heresies, his friends did not lose time to espouse his cause. Some of these were Samuel Ibn Tibbin, Al Charisi, Bedarshi, Ibn Kaspe, Ben Palquera, David Kimchi, and Nachmanides.

To the last named of this coterie of men, we shall now devote special attention, in view of the importance he won for himself as a Biblical commentator.

The fuller name of Nachmanides was Moses Ben Nachman Gerondi, which was abbreviated into "Ramban," a title consisting of the initials of his name. He

was born in Gerona, Spain, in 1194, and died in Palestine, 1270. His family was one of the most illustrious among Spanish Jews. The critical faculty, of which he gave evidence early in life, was inherited by him from his father, who, himself, had reached to high rungs of scholarship. From his earliest youth he took for his ideal the great Talmudic authority, Alfazi. Apart from devoting himself to Biblical and Talmudical research, which in his time constituted the provinces in which talented Jewish young men had to be trained, he studied medicine and philosophy, and in addition to mastering Spanish and Hebrew, was an expert in Arabic. He was thoroughly at home in the writings of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Maimonides, as evidenced by him in his works, on the one side, and in his defence of Maimonides on the other. History reports of him, that he took the leading part, on account of his extensive Jewish knowledge and wide communal influence, in a religious disputation, in the year 1263, at Barcelona. In the royal palace were assembled bishops and priests, men and women of the Court, knights, and leaders of the municipality. Into the presence of this august assemblage, Nachmanides was invited, to defend the teachings of Judaism, against the charges of the apostate Jew, Fra Paolo Christiani of Montpellier, a missionary to the Jews. The session lasted several days, at the end of which, Nachmanides chronicled his victory over an unprincipled apostate.

As Nachmanides championed the cause of Maimonides against his enemies, so he took up the cause of Alfazi, against Sarachya Halevi and Abraham Ben David, who attacked Alfazi's Talmudic productions. In the latter part of his life, Nachmanides was very anxious to visit

Jerusalem, and undertook the journey in 1267. It is stated that the journey to the Holy Land was undertaken on account of his violation of the King's order to the effect, that the disputation, in which Nachmanides took part in Barcelona, was to remain unknown to the various communities. The place of his burial is not definitely known. Some claim that his remains were interred at Kaifa, while others state that his burial took place in the City of Jerusalem.

In addition to Talmudic works, he produced also literature of a homilectical and ritualistic kind; as for example, his writings on the holiness and significance of marriage; on customs of mourning; on reward and punishment; and on kindred subjects. That he took quite an active part in the development of the Qabbalah is generally recognized. The work issuing from his pen, which interests us most, from the standpoint of our present specific study of him, is his commentary on the Pentateuch, usually found printed below the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra in the *Miqraoth Gedoloth*, the large edition of the Hebrew Bible. Although a defender of Maimonides, Nachmanides was not as pronounced a rationalist as Maimonides. It is true, his commentary is marked by the *Peshat*, the natural sense, but through it runs a strong undercurrent of mysticism, which makes him the first of Biblical critics to introduce into the study of the Bible, the flavor of the Qabbalah. One of the points, in which he more particularly differs from Maimonides, is his belief in the miracles of the Bible; not saying, as did Maimonides, that they should be expounded in the light of natural phenomena, but holding that human affairs are miraculously controlled.

The introduction to the book of Genesis, written by Nachmanides, declares his position with reference to Scriptures, and we shall, therefore, consider a few of its statements. Says Nachmanides:

“Moses wrote the whole Torah upon dictation from God. . . . The two tablets of stone contain the Ten Commandments, the term ‘commandments’ including both commandments and prohibitions. . . . When Moses returned from Mt. Sinai, he wrote the first part of the Torah to the end of the account of the building of the Tabernacle, while the latter part was written by Moses at the end of the fortieth year of Israel’s wandering through the desert. . . . Fifty avenues of comprehension were created in the world, and Moses was denied only one of these, in accordance with Psalm 8:6: ‘Thou hast made him little less than God.’ . . . Know my answer to the question, why I have written my commentary as I did. I adhere to the methods of the ancients, and wish to encourage the study of Scriptures among people, on Sabbaths and holidays, inasmuch as I refresh the heart with the natural interpretation, and add to it, many an explanation of the hidden wisdom.”

In view of the fact that Nachmanides helped to cultivate the Qabbalah, he became, as his commentary shows, a severe critic of Ibn Ezra, the outspoken opponent to the Jewish Medieval mysticism. It is Professor Schechter, who says of Nachmanides, when contrasting him with Maimonides, “If he was not a profound thinker like the author of the Guide of the Perplexed, he had that which is next best—he felt profoundly.”

Whereas Nachmanides did considerable to allay the

bitter feelings between Maimonists and anti-Maimonists, he did not succeed in putting an end to the declarations previously made, that Maimonides, with his writings, overthrew the foundations of Jewish belief. For several centuries, it was considered heretical to study the *More Nebuchim*. Only as the intellectual atmosphere was clarified by the growing strength of the rationalistic movement, was the work which Maimonides rendered the cause of Biblical exegesis, by his harmonization between Biblical and Aristotelean thought, appreciated as it deserved.

# **MENDELSSOHN AND THE BIURISTS**





## CHAPTER VII

### MENDELSSOHN AND THE BIURISTS

History reveals some queer phenomena. The progress it chronicles in the civilization of mankind, is shown to be far from constant. In many instances, humanity appears to find it impossible to make many strides forward, without first stepping back a short distance. This observation holds good both in the case of universal history, and in the annals of separate peoples. The story of the Jew is no exception to the rule. Often, when a tidal wave of expansion and growth gives promise of its uninterrupted, aye even perpetual flow, the ebb sets in, and prevents, for many cycling years, the resumption of activity, calculated to event in a broader culture.

The death of Maimonides may be said to mark one of the turning points in the development of the world's Jewry, not because of the hostile attitude assumed by his opponents, toward his philosophy, but because of the unfavorable conditions which dawned for Jews, almost everywhere on the European Continent. Proscriptions and persecutions constituted the lot of Israel. The Christian Church completely possessed by the desire to Christianize the world, was bent upon exterminating the synagogue. Living amid such harrassing environment in every European country, the Jew could hardly be expected to continue, for any great length of time, his cultivation of religious philosophy and of scientific

exegesis. With the exception of some minor philosophical treatises, Levi Ben Gerson's "Milchamoth Adonay" —"Battles of the Lord" (written in the first half of the Fourteenth Century), and Joseph Albo's "Iqqarim" —"Fundamental Principles" (produced in the Fifteenth Century), constituted the only important contributions to religious philosophy, since the creation of the "More Nebuchim."

The peculiar kinds of literature, offsprings of oppression and persecution the Jews suffered in the middle ages, are poetry, Qabbalism, history, apologetics, and legal codes. The poetry reflected the sorrows and hopes of an outraged people, and found its way into the ritual of the synagogue. The Qabbalism monumentalized mystical speculations about God, His relation to the universe, and the relation of the universe to Him; the series of created worlds, and the secret of their emanations, the reciprocal influence of worlds on one another, the occult significance of the names of the Deity, the existence of angels and demons, and the nature of the world to come. History treats of the description of separate communities, their trials and tribulations. Apologetics concerns itself with the explanation of Jewish loyalty and the defense against the unjust charges made against Jews, either by Christian theologians or Jewish apostates. The legal codes, such as the "Turim" and the "Schulchan Arukh," summarized the Biblical and rabbinical rules and regulations to be followed by the Jew, in the government of his conduct. Every literary effort was expended in the production of such works, which helped to familiarize Jews with ritualistic enactments, to promote ecclesiastical unity and solidar-

ity, despite their world-wide dispersion, and to rescue them from a carefully planned annihilation.

It was in consequence of this peculiar status of the Jews of the Middle Ages, that the science of Biblical criticism was allowed to remain for centuries, fallow ground among them. We do not mean to convey by this statement, the idea, that no one ever endeavored to explain the meaning of a Biblical passage. Biblical interpretations are indeed to be found in nine out of every ten works, produced amid the Mediæval persecutions, but these interpretations are given only incidentally, as they were employed to cite Biblical foundation for some hope entertained, for some defense set up, for some legal enactment formulated, and for some theory advocated. Nor do we wish to ignore the commentaries on Isaiah and Ezekiel by Moses Ben Shesheth, living in Babylonia in the Thirteenth Century; that of Eleazar Ashkenasi on the Pentateuch, living in the Fourteenth Century; that of Nethanel Ben Isaiah on the Pentateuch, living at the same time; and those of Bachya Ben Ascher, Nathan Ben Samuel, Asher Ben Jechiel, Samuel Ben Nissim, Simon Ben Zemach Duran, Nissim Ben Moses, Eleazer Ben Jehudah of Worms, Don Isaac Abarbanel, and others. The point, however, that we do desire to make, is this—that until the Eighteenth Century, no epoch-making work in Biblical exegesis came into existence, with the exception of the “*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*” of Benedict Spinoza, the Dutch philosopher, who, although excommunicated from the synagogue, by the Amsterdam rabbinate, may nevertheless be regarded a link in the chain of Jewish Biblical interpreters, not simply because he was born a Jew, but

because his rationalism was influenced, in great measure, by the exegesis of Maimonides.

That it was no easy task to lead the Jew again to the study of the Bible, in accordance with its natural meaning, requires no detailed demonstration. The night, through which the Jew had passed, had lasted so long, that some of his intellectual powers, more particularly those bespeaking careful analysis and investigation, had been completely lulled to sleep. For the Christian world, the Middle Ages had come to an end, with the opening of the Eighteenth Century, but for the Jew they were not yet to be succeeded by the much to be desired Renaissance. In almost every country of Europe, he was doomed to associate only with his own, to live in the Ghettos, and to pursue vocations defined for him by law. He was thus naturally denied that intellectual broadening, which would have been his, in consequence of the intercourse with people who looked at the problems of life and the mysteries of the universe, from view points different than his own. The only mental exercise, in which the Jew was therefore in position to indulge, was that which came with the study of the rabbinical law. And luckily for him, that he was at least permitted to study his legal codes. It rescued him from complete mental decay. What wonder, however, that in the face of the discriminations made against him, the Jew soon learned to prefer the narrow environment, both physical and intellectual, into which he had been originally forced by the orders of kings, and the edicts of ecclesiastics. While virtually all over Europe, the condition of the Jew was equally distressing, the step for his improvement was taken in Germany. Germany was

gradually gaining the ascendancy in culture, on the European Continent, and while its Jews spoke the Jewish German jargon, that jargon, because so pronouncedly German in character, furnished the Jews with the key to the understanding of the sciences and the arts the Germans cultivated. And when once the Jews had gazed beyond the narrow circle of their Talmudical environment, they soon began to develop again the study of the Bible, from the rationalistic point of view, in addition to familiarizing themselves with the truths and discoveries called into life by the rationalism of the newer day.

Many a man, of course, contributed his share to the modernization of the Jew, but the greatest part of the work certainly, must be ascribed to Moses Mendelssohn. Moses Mendelssohn was born at Dessau, Germany, Sept. 6, 1729, and died at Berlin, Jan. 4, 1786. He was the son of a scribe, who engaged in the copying of Torah manuscripts for a living. Mendelssohn's first teacher was his father, and his later instructor was David Frankel, the Rabbi of his native town.

When, in 1743, Frankel was called as Rabbi to Berlin, Mendelssohn, broken-hearted because of separation from his teacher, determined to follow him to the capitol of Germany. He arrived there a poor and friendless boy, but soon, by virtue of his powers and affability, formed the acquaintance of men, who gladly assisted him in his further education. Israel Samoscz initiated him into the mysteries of mathematics, and gave him instruction in the Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages. Dr. Gumpertz taught him German literature, and the French and English language; and Dr. Kisch was responsible

for his Latin knowledge. While subsequently occupying the position as tutor in the family of a silk manufacturer, Isaac Bernhard, and a little later that of his bookkeeper, Mendelssohn studied the works of the Greek philosophers and those of Spinoza, Leibnitz, Locke and others. Of Lessing, the German literateur, he soon became an intimate friend. It is to this friendship, that Mendelssohn owed his mastery of the pure German, and his immortalization as Lessing's "Nathan the Wise." Mendelssohn's writings attracted the attention of the learned men of Berlin and other cities. Friedrich Nicolai invited him to become a collaborer in the "Bibliothek der Schönen Wissenschaften und der Freien Künste." Among others who became interested in him, were the Crown Prince of Brunswick, the Count and Countess of Schaumburg-Lippe, Luise Ulrika of Sweden, and Johann Kaspar Lavater, a preacher of Zürich, Switzerland. It was the last named, who tried to convert Mendelssohn to Christianity by sending Mendelssohn Charles Bonnet's investigation of the proofs for Christianity, with the request, or rather challenge, "either to refute the book publicly, or if he found it logical, to do what wisdom, love of truth and honor required, and what Socrates would have done if he had read the work and found it irrefutable." Mendelssohn accepted the challenge, and proved that Bonnet's book did not succeed in converting him, and that his belief in the truths of his own religion, was unshakable.

The debate, however, was not at an end. One brochure after another was written against Mendelssohn, to the most of which he replied. This controversy soon began to tell upon his health, so that he was eventually com-

pelled to seek recreation at Pyrmont, where he formed the acquaintance of Herder, an acquaintance which soon developed into the warmest friendship.

Mendelssohn's philosophical writings are many and various. Because of his "Phaedon," which is patterned after Plato's dialogue by the same name, and which treats of the immortality of the soul, he bears the name, "German Plato" and sometimes also that of "German Socrates." He wrote also extensively on literary problems, from the critical standpoint.

While his activities in the interest of Jews, for the purpose of gaining for them civil emancipation, which was still denied them in Europe, evidenced itself not only in marked personal propaganda, but also in valuable writings, and while his exposition of the Jewish faith was lucidly presented in his "Jerusalem," "Morgenstunden" and his translation of Menasseh Ben Israel's "Rescue of the Jews," his constructive influence in behalf of Jewish thought, was exercised most tellingly by means of his Biblical researches.

Mendelssohn felt that it was absolutely necessary for the German Jews to forget their jargon, and learn to speak the German language. He held that this was their duty not only as subjects of the Prussian government, but also as members of society, who should be eager to avail themselves of the culture of their time. He knew of no better way of bringing about this desired end, than by translating the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Song of Songs into German. The translations met with cordial welcome at the hands of the more enlightened Jewish constituency, and also with opposition, resulting in the pronouncing of a ban on his Pen-



tateuch, at the hands of such men as Raphael Kohen of Altoona.

The Pentateuch was finished in 1783. Although his opponents pointed to dangers into which Jews would run, by using a translation of parts of the Bible, in the vernacular of the land, these dangers were not realized. The Mendelssohn translations had the direct opposite effect. Apart from making Jews appreciative of the value of the broader Jewish culture, the Mendelssohn translations aroused within them an interest in the study of Hebrew grammar, which, during the long night of Medieval persecution, had been almost altogether neglected by them.

A few extracts from Mendelssohn's introduction to his translations, will suffice to present a clear idea of the motives which actuated him to undertake the epoch-making work.

Says Mendelssohn in his introduction to the Pentateuch translation:

"As long as the Israelites did not change their language, they were not in need of a translation of the Holy Scriptures.—When they came to Babylon, they were assimilated with the people, and the children forgot the mother tongue.—When Ezra and his followers noticed that the mother tongue had been forgotten by the great mass of the people, teachers translated the Scriptures into Aramaic. His object was to get the people to understand the Scriptures by means of translation, and to get them to learn anew, the forgotten language.—When the Greeks gained the supremacy, the Aramaic was set aside.—Thus they forgot also the translation which Ezra had ordered.—Aquila translated the

Scriptures into Greek.—Aquila was, however, not the first Greek translator. The Septuagint, and other Greek versions, were written before his.—In the year 307, (1547), there appeared at Constantine, a Pentateuch with Spanish and Greek translation.”

In the introduction to his translation of the Psalms, he asks the reader to forget for a short time, everything read in translations, expositions and paraphrases, and also to note, how, in many places, he, Mendelssohn, deviated from all his predecessors. He calls attention to the fact that changes were made by him, based on critical grounds. He acknowledges his indebtedness to Michaelis' translation, and to that of Professor Knapp, and to Luther, for the German diction. The critical attitude of Mendelssohn, is shown, for example, in his notes on Psalm 68, when he states that Psalm 68 could not have been written by David, firstly because the style is not Davidean, and secondly on account of the advice given to desist from war.

With regard to Canticles he says in his introduction to his translation, that Canticles is not all one poem, but a series of poems, sung by the shepherd and shepherdess alternately.

It was Mendelssohn, who, in giving a critique of Robert Lowth's lectures on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews, made the valuable study of the illustrious Oxford scholar, accessible to the German speaking world. Says Mendelssohn in substance, by way of introduction to his criticism, “Although many have attempted to translate and explain Scriptures, few have taken the trouble to exhibit the sources of beauty greatly admired by the masters of the Hebrew language. People

are wont to take great care in the study of Homer and Virgil, but seldom do people try to master the fundamental rules of Hebrew poetry. He that wishes to speak on Hebrew poetry, must know more than the grammar of the language. He must combine with his knowledge of the language its philosophy, and must know how to differentiate between the specific talents of different peoples. Lowth's treatise is surely such a work."

Although Mendelssohn might have been justified in believing, that he rendered valuable service in the better understanding of Scriptures, by making his translation of the Pentateuch and the other books mentioned, he felt that the translation had to be supplemented by a commentary. The task of producing the commentary in question, was assigned to Solomon Dubno, who was born at the City of Dubno 1738, and who died at Amsterdam 1813. Dubno had enjoyed the valuable instruction which the schools of Galicia offered, and had won for himself fame, for a work on the Hebrew accents. However, Dubno did not finish the task. All that emanated from his pen was a commentary in Hebrew on the book of Genesis, on account of the fact that he became intimidated by the adverse criticisms of the reactionary party. At first Mendelssohn thought of finishing the commentary himself, but he realized the great difficulties which such a work entailed. He therefore divided the task. He himself produced the commentary on Exodus. Leviticus was annotated by Naphtali Herz Wessely, who was born in Hamburg, 1725, and who died in 1805. Wessely was especially fitted for this task, in view of his extensive acquaint-

ance, not only with the Hebrew grammar, but with all branches of knowledge which absorbed the attention of scholars in his day. The commentary on Numbers was the work of Aaron Jaroslav, who had been a teacher in the house of Mendelssohn, and afterwards resided at Lemberg, at all times one of the most prominent European Jewish centres. A part of Deuteronomy was delegated to Herz Homberg, a native of Austria, whose fame as a Talmudist had spread into Germany, and whose reading of the current literature fitted him for his contribution to Mendelssohn's Biblical commentary. The men, who are responsible for the Mendelssohnian commentary, entitled "Netibhoth Ha Shalom"—"The Paths of Peace," are known in history as the "Biurists"—"The Interpreters." To this class of commentators belongs also, Joel Loewe, who was born in 1760, and died in 1802, a man reputed for his profound grammatical knowledge, and who, together with Aaron Wolfsohn, edited the "Ha Meassef." Into this category must be placed such men as Meir Obernik, the commentator on Joshua and Judges; Samuel Detmold, who, together with Obernik, annotated Samuel; Isaac Euchel, the commentator of Proverbs, and others.

The commentary to Kaplan Rabe's translation of Ecclesiastes was written by Mendelssohn himself.

The Biblical exegesis of Mendelssohn and his collaborators, as crystallized in his commentary on the Pentateuch and on several other Biblical books, marks indeed a revolution in the attitude of Jews towards Scriptures. That revolution had for its purpose the reinstatement of the Peshat, or natural sense, into its former well-deserved recognition. Mendelssohn and his followers

studied with care, the interpretations given by Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides and Nachmanides, concealed for centuries from human ken, and combined what was valuable in them, with the conclusions based on the rationalism of the latter days of the Eighteenth and the earlier days of the Nineteenth Centuries, thus creating a new school of exegesis. While the Biurists availed themselves of the information, yielded on the intent of Scriptures also by the leaders of the Protestant Church, the fear entertained by their opponents that the Mendelssohnian interpretation would cease to have a Jewish flavor, was unfounded. It was Mediæval mysticism that had invaded the study of the Bible, to which the Mendelssohnian exegetes dealt a fatal blow; but the genuine principles of Jewish theology not only did not suffer, but actually benefited by the much decried movement. The door to Biblical lore had once more been thrown open to admit the People of the Book to their rightful place. As Luther had been the father of the Christian Reformation, so Mendelssohn became the sponsor of the Jewish Reformation.

Whether Mendelssohn was conscious of the rich harvest that crowned his sowing, may be doubtful. Suffice it to say that he sowed wisely and discreetly. He not only Germanized the German Jew, but also modernized the Jews all over the world. His researches found their way gradually, into all Jewish communities. He was the third Moses to have been born in the history of Israel, commissioned to undertake his people's redemption, from the degrading and annihilating obscurantism. He was the forerunner, who, by his sincerity and honesty, his love of reason and truth, paved the

way, not only for the Jew's political, but also for the Jew's intellectual emancipation, a prominent feature of which demonstrated itself in the higher exegesis for which the age succeeding the Mendelssohnian became celebrated.



**THE NINETEENTH CENTURY  
CRITICS**





## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY CRITICS

One of the most interesting chapters in the story of the Jews, from all points of view, is the one that covers the Nineteenth Century. The hopes which Mendelssohn had entertained, when he undertook to plead the cause of the Jew, before the Non-Jewish world, and to translate the Bible into German, for the benefit of German Jewry, began to be realized, if not in fullest, at least in partial measure, shortly after his death. Had he been spared to round out a century, the sorrow he would have experienced upon beholding members of his own family forsaking the religion of their fathers, would certainly have been mitigated by that delight which would have been his, on witnessing the removal of civil disabilities from his people. Although the Jew was not declared to be entitled to the same privileges as subjects of other persuasions enjoyed in the European countries, and periods of Jewish recognition were time and again followed by periods of Jewish repression, the lot of the Jew was undoubtedly more endurable in the beginning of the Nineteenth Century in Germany, than it had been for centuries, all over the European Continent. Apart from the liberalism manifested by leading intellectuals, which virtue in them was the flower of their scientific thinking, several events co-operated in bettering the condition of Jews in Germany. In 1787, Mirabeau published his work on "Mendelssohn and the Pol-

itical Reform of Jews." In 1791 the French National Assembly granted full civil rights to people of the Jewish faith. In 1796, the Batavian National Assembly granted Jews citizenship. In 1807, Napoleon the First, convened the celebrated Great Synhedrion of French Jews.

What happened outside of Germany was sure to react upon Germany itself. The agitation carried on in other countries was soon taken up by the German Government. The Government found, that its Jewish subjects, with the permission granted them to leave the Ghettos and the narrow mental disciplines for which the Ghetto was responsible, gave promise of being no less German in nationality, than the Germans of other faiths. The Jewish jargon had been, by many Jews, exchanged for the purer language of the land. The conviction became general, that given the opportunities, the Jew would become a valuable contributor to the sum total of Germany's material and intellectual welfare. In one province after another, emancipation, with its implied rights, was granted them. In 1808, Westphalia and Baden removed Jewish disabilities. In 1811, Hamburg followed in the wake. In 1812, Mecklenburg and Prussia did the same. And in time, other provinces emancipated their Jewish subjects.

Whatever the value of the various privileges granted by the emancipation acts may have been to the Jews of Germany, not one compares in point of blessedness with the opening of the doors of the German gymnasiums and universities to Jewish students. Attendance at the higher seats of learning had been denied Jews, until the close of the first decade of the Nineteenth

Century. The introduction of the use of the pure German by Mendelssohn, had served Jews as a good foundation, on which to build the knowledge of the sciences now offered them. No sooner had they become acquainted with the sciences and the philosophies, taught at the higher academical institutions, but they began to apply modern scientific and philosophical methods in the prosecution of their religious studies. It was felt, that religion and everything pertaining to it, should be subjected to the same sort of analysis as all other disciplines. The prevailing attitude assumed towards the Bible, therefore, was sure to undergo a decided change. While characteristically Jewish, and based on conclusions of the rationalistic interpreters of the Middle Ages, the attitude towards the Scriptures was, in great measure, defined by the philosophy of the day. The character of the Biblical exegesis championed by the Jewish scholars of these times, may be said to have been an almost unanimous desire to accentuate the *Peshat*, the natural sense of Scriptures. The means employed were the scientific treatises, in German, on the history, text and purposes of the Bible as a whole, or its separate books, for the benefit of specialists, and the translations of Scriptures, with running commentaries in the vernacular of the country, for the use of the laity. It was felt, that these means were necessary, in view of the obtaining ignorance in supposedly learned circles, with reference to the history of the Bible, and in view of the gradual loss of the knowledge of pure Hebrew, on the part of the people.

The first man to claim our attention as valuable contributor to the better understanding of the meaning of

Scriptures, is LEOPOLD ZUNZ. He was the first, not only in point of time, but also in point of service and influence, so that he is today known as the father of that movement which has been designated by the name "Wissenschaft des Judenthums"—"the science of Judaism."

Leopold Zunz was born at Detmold, August 10, 1794, and died in 1886. He was bereft of his parents in his early youth, and received his rearing in an institution at Wolfenbüttel, where he became the intimate friend of a fellow student, Isaac Marcus Jost, the celebrated historian. It was, however, not long before he found his way into the gymnasium at Brunswick, where he received the foundation for that extensive classical training, which served him in such excellent stead, in the literary career in winning for him his enviable fame. In view of the temporary denial of university advantages, which the Jews of Germany were once more called upon to suffer, Zunz turned preacher of a small Berlin congregation worshipping in the private house of Jacob Herz Beer. He did not continue very long in that capacity, for in 1823 the royal edict forbade the delivery of sermons in the vernacular, and all other innovations in the ritual of the German Synagogue. Zunz therefore turned his attention to the larger congregation, consisting of Jews and non-Jews, whose constituents were to be found among people interested in the scientific presentation of historical, Biblical, and religious problems. In 1819, we find him establishing a society for Jewish culture and science, together with Edward Gans and Moses Moser. The object of this organization was to bring about the religious culture of Jewry, along

modern scientific lines. To carry out its lofty aim, a journal for the promotion of the science of Judaism, was published under the supervision of Zunz; but unfortunately, only three numbers of that journal appeared, owing to the financial embarrassment of the venture. Although the journal was discontinued, it had engendered an appreciation for the science of Judaism, which could not be checked in its growth, but continued to unfold from strength to strength, in the course of the succeeding years. The liberty of thought, which Zunz had won for the people, was now considered a *conditio sine qua non*, not only of the people's true culture, but also of their complete happiness. Like Zunz himself, the people recognized the natural relationship between the cultivation of Jewish science and the enjoyment of civil emancipation. Zunz now acted in the capacity of political editor for Spener's Journal. From 1825 to 1829 he was in charge of a Jewish school, and subsequently acted as preacher in the City of Prague. From 1839 to 1849, he was on the directorate of the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in Berlin.

One of the most important critical works, of which we are in possession, from the pen of Zunz, is his essay on Rashi, which served as model for all future dissertations of its kind. The "Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden," the "Synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters," "Ritus des Synagogalen Gottesdienstes" and "Literatur-Geschichte der Synagogalen Poesie" are products of his pen, which exercised no little influence in the establishment of the Jewish scientific thought of the past century. In "Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge" he demonstrates, that homeletical disquisitions constituted

a part of the ritual of the Synagogue, since the earliest times, and that the character of these disquisitions always reflected the civilization of the times and the countries in which the Jews lived. The subject was scientifically presented. While Zunz, in this work, made propaganda for scientific research in the study of history and religion, he was by no means oblivious of the dangers, into which mere science could lead the Jewish, as well as every other religion. Tradition with him, was of great help in withholding the student from unwarranted extremes. It was, therefore, with the desire to emphasize the power of tradition, in the polity of the Jew, that he produced his works treating of the synagogal poetry.

In the field of Biblical criticism, he demonstrated an independence of view point, which is nothing short of surprising, when Zunz is studied in the light of that Talmudic tyranny, which still held sway in his time. Thus, for example, he recognized the composite character of the Pentateuch, and the lateness of some of its sections. He states that Genesis, in more than one place, proves, that it was composed several centuries after the settlement of Israel in Palestine. Jacob's blessings he does not consider earlier than the Prophet Isaiah's date. Exodus and Leviticus he regards exilic. Deuteronomy he finds consisting of three parts. The address of Moses in the thirty-second chapter of that Book, he believes to be a product of the Exile. The blessing of Moses he deems the latest stratum of Deuteronomy. The Book of Esther he placed into the Maccabean period, and he states, that Koheleth belongs to the same age.

Zunz also produced a Bible for lay reading, which, while based on the Masoretic text, did not ignore the later scholarship. In this Bible he is responsible only for the Book of Chronicles, the rest of the work having been done by Heyman Arnheim, Julius Fürst, and Michael Sachs.

HEYMAN ARNHEIM, who was born in 1796 and died in 1865, was Rabbi at Wongrowitz. Having translated into German the Book of Job, and written a commentary thereto, and having thus evidenced the breadth of his scholarship, he was invited to become Zunz's collaborator in the Bible he planned.

JULIUS FÜRST was born in 1805 and died in 1873. He studied in Berlin, Breslau and Halle. Having had for his teachers such men as Hegel, Neander and Gesenius, in addition to being richly endowed by nature, with strong mental faculties, it is but natural, that he should have found his way easily, into the front ranks of German Jewish scholars. In his Biblical exegesis, he availed himself of the results obtained from the study of Hebrew in the light of its cognate languages. In Leipsic he was "Privat-Dozent" in Aramaic, Syriac and Hebrew grammar, and in 1864 the Saxon Government awarded to him the Professor title. In addition to his collaboration in the Zunz Bible, he wrote on the structure of the Aramaic idiom, published a Hebrew and Aramaic dictionary, and a concordance of the books of the Old Testament; wrote on the history of Biblical literature and the Jewish Midrashic writings; produced a treatise on the canon of the Old Testament in accordance with the traditions of the Talmud and Midrash; translated Saadia's "Emunoth Wedeoeth";



treated the history of Karaism; edited a weekly, called "The Orient"; and published independently an illustrated Bible, with commentary.

MICHAEL JEHIEL SACHS was born in 1808, and died in 1864. After graduating from the University of Berlin, he became Rabbi in Prague. In 1835 he published a German translation of the Psalms, and later an exegetical interpretation of the fifty-eighth chapter of Jeremiah. He was an authority on the religious poetry of the Jews in Spain, having written a book on the subject. He also wrote on the relation between the Greco-Roman world and the Midrashim.

While these four men were serving the cause of German Jewry, SAMUEL CAHEN, who was born in 1796 and died in 1862, was looking after the intellectual and religious interests of French Jews. After studying and tutoring in Germany, he went to Paris, as director of the Jewish Consistorial School. It was he, who gave the French Jews a French translation of the Bible, accompanied by careful notes. Cahen, although making some valuable contributions to Jewish Biblical literature, outside of Germany, by no means exerted so great an influence in his country, as did the great critical scholars, Isaac Samuel Reggio and Samuel David Luzzatto, in Italy.

REGGIO was born in 1784 and died in 1855. He was master of French, German, Latin, and the Semitic dialects. He was founder of the Rabbinical Seminary at Padua. Taking Mendelssohn and the Biurists as his examples, he translated the Pentateuch, and accompanied it with a Hebrew commentary. He rejected Aggadic interpretations, and stands out, therefore, as

a champion of the natural sense of Scriptures. Although he felt that the Biblical text was well preserved, he confessed that a number of scribal errors, found their way into it.

SAMUEL DAVID LUZZATTO was born in 1800, and died in 1865. Already in his early youth, he gave signs of extraordinary ability. It is told of him, that while attending school, he conceived the idea of writing a commentary on the Book of Job, feeling, that existing commentaries were unsatisfactory and misleading. Luzzatto wrote a translation of the Pentateuch, with a commentary, a translation of Job, a translation with commentary on Isaiah, and notes on Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Proverbs. In 1817, he published "Maamar Ha Nikkud," a treatise on vowels. The Syriac language found in him a master, whose employment of the same, led to the better understanding of the Targum. Realizing the imperfect condition of the Hebrew text of the Bible, he suggested numerous emendations. His belief that Koheleth was not written by King Solomon shows his departure from long hallowed teaching.

With the exception of Cahen's, Reggio's and Luzzatto's contributions to Biblical research, all the work in this line, which is of any consequence to the science of Judaism, fell to the lot of German scholars. It is, therefore, that we return to Germany, in our examination touching the development of Biblical exegesis.

A translation of the Bible in German was produced by SOLOMON HERXHEIMER, who was born in 1801, studied at Marburg and Göttingen, and died in 1884. His Bible, accompanied by a running commentary, seeks to translate the Scriptures literally, and to interpret the same from the grammatical and historical points of view.

Almost simultaneously with Herxheimer's translation, LUDWIG PHILIPPSOHN produced one. He was born in 1811, was educated in Halle and Berlin, was preacher at Magdeburg; edited "Die Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums," a Jewish weekly; published works on the development of the religious idea in Judaism, Christianity and the Islam, and on political and religious problems, thus making propaganda for the further emancipation of Jews; wrote poems and historical novels; and died in 1889. His Bible was illustrated, and contains a commentary, in which are reflected the best conclusions of Jewish and Christian interpreters. In his introductions to the various books, he gives their character, "Tendenz" and history, and a psychological study of each one of the prominent personages of which the books treat.

LEVI HERZFELD, who was born in 1810, educated in Berlin and was Rabbi at Brunswick, was one of the factors to convene the first Rabbinical convention in Brunswick, wrote a history of Israel, treated Hebrew stems, translated and commented the Book of Koheleth, and died in 1884.

One of the principal men in the field of Biblical exegesis, as influenced by the spirit of the science of Judaism, and one that is worthy collaborer of Zunz, is ABRAHAM GEIGER. He was born in 1810 and died in 1874. His education in Biblical and Talmudic lore, was thorough from the very start. His scientific education, undertaken for the purpose of subsequent devotion to Oriental philology, was obtained at the universities of Heidelberg, Bonn, and Marburg. He was Rabbi at Wiesbaden, then at Breslau, and later in Berlin. In the

last named place, he became one of the teachers of the Institute for the Promotion of the Science of Judaism.

One of his first publications was "Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?" He published a Jewish theological review, a Jewish journal of science and life, a text-book of the language of the Mishnah, a monograph on Maimonides, studies on the Hebrew grammarians, Jewish poets, Jewish history, Jewish philosophy, comparative religion, and Jewish Biblical exegesis. His principal work, which gives him a prominent place in Biblical criticism, was his "Urschrift und Uebersetzung der Bibel"—the original text and translation of the Bible. It treats the history of the Scriptures, from the Exile to the times of Hadrian, Emperor of Rome, and deals with the causes for the existence of the different recensions. In the course of this treatise he makes a critical investigation of the different books of Scriptures, Biblical institutions, Jewish sects and their tendencies, the different ancient versions, the Apocryphal Writings, the Tetragrammaton, and the various names of God. It is this book which has value not only for the Jewish Biblical scholar, but has also found its way, as authority, into the schools of Christian Biblical students.

Although Geiger's exegetical position has been commended and adopted generally in scientific circles, by Jewish and non-Jewish scholars, it did not escape attack. One of his most bitter opponents, although originally an ardent friend and admirer of Geiger, was SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH, the leader of the Jewish orthodox movement in Germany. He was born in 1808 and died in 1888, as Rabbi, in Frankfurt on the Main.

He was a profound Talmudic scholar, but did not fail to combine with his Talmudic knowledge, the academical training obtained at the University of Bonn, at the same time Geiger attended that institution. Hirsch wrote a number of brochures, in which he defended Jewish orthodox theology and criticism against the newer conclusions of the science of Judaism, edited a monthly entitled "Jeshurun," produced a translation of the Pentateuch, and another translation of the Psalms with commentary.

A man, who studied the Bible from the critical point of view, despite the conservatism of his theology, was HEINRICH GRAETZ, the celebrated Jewish historian. He was born in 1817, and died in 1891. He was a graduate of the university of Jena, obtaining his Doctorate on a dissertation entitled "Gnosticism and Judaism." He first had expected to follow the journalistic career, but in 1854 he became professor in the Rabbinical Seminary at Breslau, teaching simultaneously at the University of Breslau, after having received from the Government the title of Professor. Graetz took an active part in the furtherance of the work of the "Alliance Israelite Universelle," waged war against anti-Semitism by word of mouth and pen, and won for himself immortality by his history of the Jews. In addition to articles contributed by him to Fränkel's *Monatsschrift* on Biblical subjects, he became a direct contributor to Biblical exegesis by his translations of, and commentaries on, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, and the Psalms.

With regard to Ecclesiastes he holds, that it must have been written in the Maccabean times, and that the King alluded to in the book, must be the Idumean,

Herod. He makes numerous emendations in the text; and points out the numerous Grecisms the author employs. Of Canticles he holds that it came into existence in the Macedonian period, shortly before Hellenistic apostacies took place in Judea, probably a half of a century before the Maccabean Wars. Of the Book of Psalms he claims, that it is composite in character, and hence, doubts the Davidic origin of the greatest number of them. He does not hesitate to change the text, at times, in these Biblical books. In addition to these works, Emendations of the text of Isaiah and Jeremiah were also published. Some of the Jewish critics, who reflected the modern higher criticism, are Kaufman Kohler in his "Blessing of Jacob" and Canticles, and Claude Montefiore in his "Bible For Home Reading."

Numerous other persons could be mentioned in the treatment of Biblical research carried on during the Nineteenth Century, who have added by the discussion of separate books and separate component chapters of the Scriptures, to the existing wealth of exegetical knowledge. They are, however, not necessary in an attempt to convey a clear idea as to the part Jews played in that discipline which is calculated to rid the Biblical thought of the overgrowth nurtured by theological bias and the preconceived notions as to the intent of the greatest book found in the library of mankind. The men treated, prove beyond the shadow of doubt, that the objects cherished in the cultivation of the science of Judaism were to bring about the return to the natural sense of Scriptures, to strengthen the hold of the Biblical thought upon the mind of humanity, to recast Judaism, as well as other denominations by the aid of

philosophical research, and to promote the cause of that higher religion, the purpose of which is the conservation and consecration of truth. Biblical criticism may today be cultivated to a greater extent, outside of Jewry, than within it; and yet the fact cannot be gainsaid, that all who are building today the massive structure of exegesis, are building on the foundation laid by the Jewish savants, and with the material they have left in the form of discoveries and conclusions to the present generation of scholars. Although the indebtedness of the modern critic to the Jewish researches is acknowledged by many, the time will come when the scribes, beginning with Ezra, the Rabbis of Mishnah, Talmud, Targumim and Midrashim, the Karaites and Saadia, the Grammarians and Lexicographers, Rashi, the Tossafists, Ibn Ezra, the Kimchis, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Mendelssohn and the Biurists, Zunz, Philipsohn, Geiger, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Graetz, and others, will be regarded everywhere indispensable links in the development of Biblical exegesis, and when the Jewish presentation of the Bible will be looked upon as having a message worthy of the highest regard, in the explanation of the intent and meaning of Scriptures.

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